



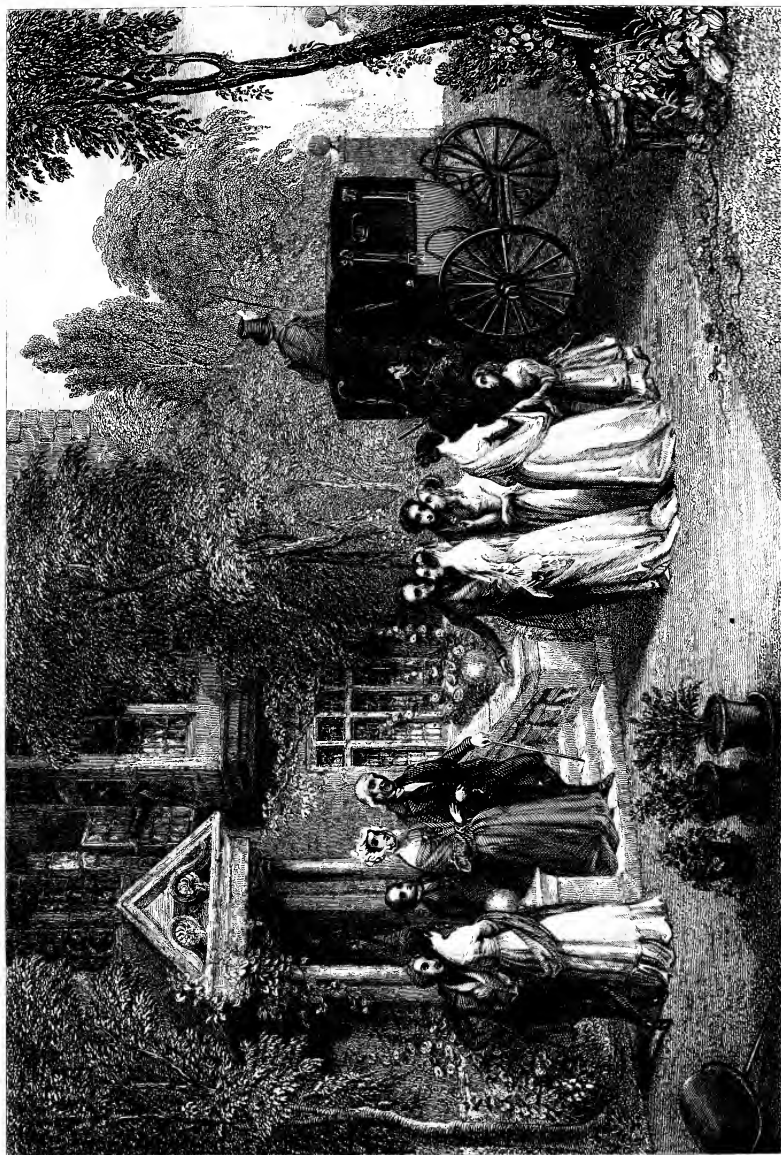
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# FAMILY SECRETS,

D.R.

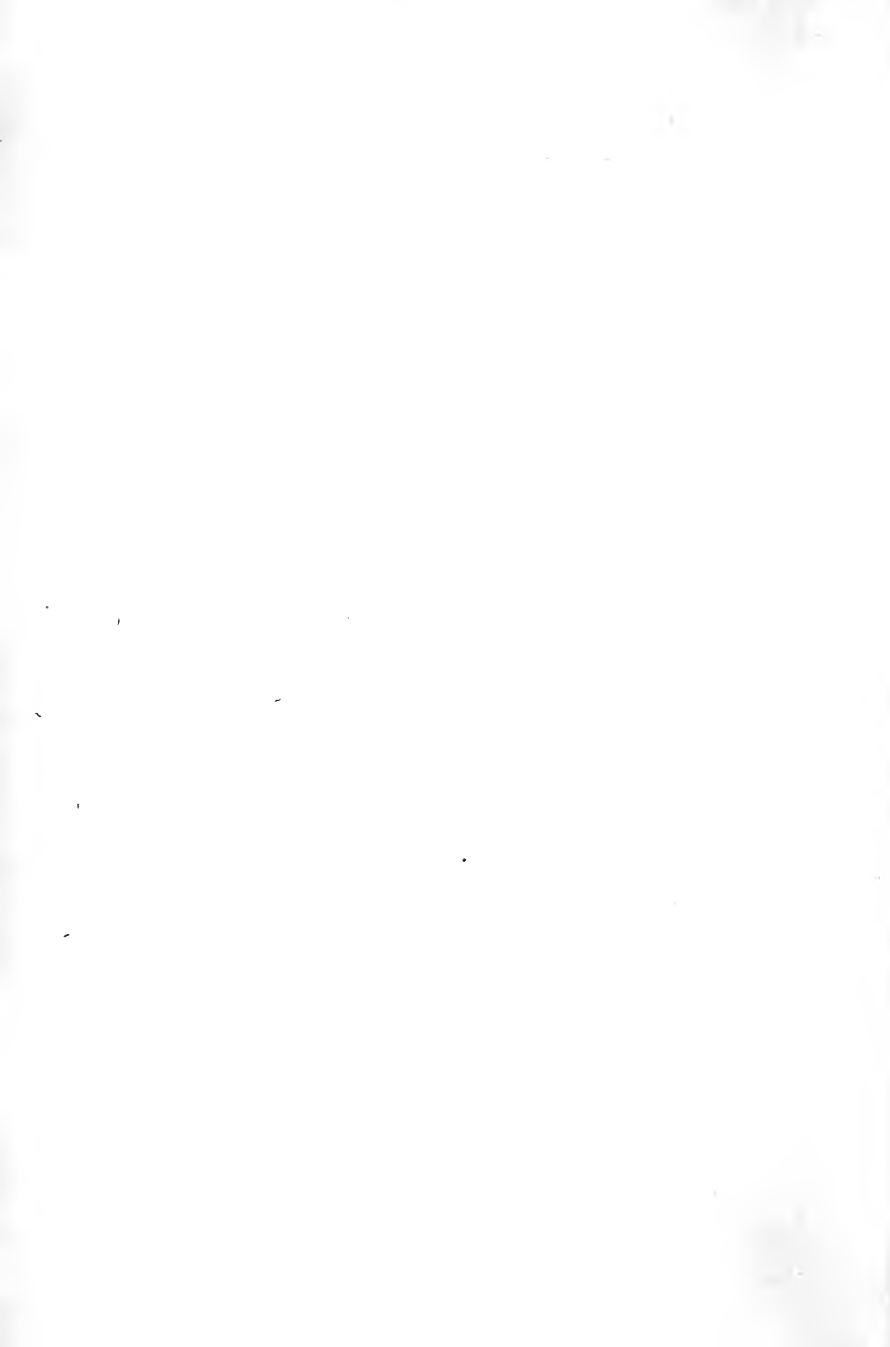
Hints to those who would make

HOME HAPPY.

*By M<sup>rs</sup> Ellis.*



*The danger of dining out*



# FAMILY SECRETS

OR

HINTS TO THOSE

WHO WOULD MAKE HOME HAPPY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE WOMEN OF ENGLAND."

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v. 1

## P R E F A C E.

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If the occupation of writing books were simply an amusement, how pleasant might the task be made, by dwelling only upon popular or pleasing themes—by describing human life as a scene of unclouded sunshine, and human nature as exempt from sorrow and from sin!

But when the office of the writer is undertaken as a duty, rather than a pleasure, the case assumes a widely different aspect. Human life must then be described, not as it might be, but as it is; in order that truth may be recognized under the garb of fiction; and that error of opinion may thus be traced out to its inevitable consequence—error of conduct.

If, then, there be any widely prevailing evil in society, towards which public opinion is lenient in the commencement, and universally severe in the conclusion; and if such evil arise more out of laxity of principle in the many, than total depravity of heart in the few; if, also, it be an evil which the watchfulness of affection, and the tenderness of sympathy, may do much to avert; it surely cannot, however unattractive in itself, form an unfitting subject for the pen of one, who hopes never to write without reference to the encouragement of “those who would make home happy.”

ROSE HILL, HODDESDON,

Nov. 1, 1841

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# FAMILY SECRETS.

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## DANGERS OF DINING OUT.

It was a beautiful May morning, and the bells of St. Mary's were ringing merrily, when a carriage and four, adorned with white favours, drove rapidly down the street, and stopped at the entrance of a respectable mansion situated at the west-end of the town of —. At the door of this mansion stood footmen and servants, adorned in a similar manner, while the hall was thronged with brothers and sisters, uncles, aunts, and cousins, all wearing the aspect of joyous welcome, not unmingled with feelings of a deeper and more earnest character.

It was a beautiful sight, the neighbours said, to behold the bride that day; for she was a lovely creature, the favourite of her family, and of all who came within the influence of her gentle and graceful manners: and then she was so elegantly dressed; for good taste was the ruling principle of her life, subservient only to one other principle, that of doing every thing in the manner most approved by good society.

The happy bridegroom, for such indeed he might be called, was a medical gentleman of the highest reputation, just launching into public favour, as the partner of one of the oldest and most popular practitioners in the same little gossiping and busy town. And well the spectators said he looked that day; his tall gentlemanly figure dressed in black, and his dark hair and manly countenance, contrasting with the snow-white robes, the soft blue eyes, and delicate complexion of the bride. It was, in short, a wedding with which the most envious observer could find no fault; the parties were so well suited in age, character, and rank; the dresses were so admirably chosen; and every thing was conducted in so unexceptionable a manner. The very elements of nature, things animate and inanimate, the earth and air, appeared as if rejoicing in the happy auspices of the day; for, as the carriage, in the course of a few hours, again rolled away along the broad smooth road, past the little villas situated in the outskirts of the town, it seemed to sweep through a complete labyrinth of lilachs and laburnums, varied here and there by the tender green of the weeping willow, or the spiral poplar pointing to the sky.

The happy couple were setting out on that accustomed tour, which is so often the first and last excursion of a woman's life; and their journey was commencing under a sky without a cloud, while every tree, and garden, and shady grove, was vocal with the song of merry birds; young lambs were sporting on every verdant lea, and the green earth spread her carpet of scented flowers over every sloping hill and fertile plain.

Through such a scene the travellers pursued their way, we will only say with feelings of happiness, and hope; for those who write, and those who speak, seem all to have

agreed that no commentary upon married life shall commence, until after the conclusion of the first experimental tour. With the party left at home, however, it was impossible to refrain from all remark; particularly as the prospect of the bride returning so soon to settle for life beside her own family, left no excuse for grief; and there was a whole drawing-room full of guests still remaining, who had nothing else to do than exclaim about the loveliness of the scene, and the auspicious omens of the day. Nor was it until the evening, when the company was dispersed, and the younger members of the family had retired, that Mr. and Mrs. Stanley, the father and mother of the bride, found time to think seriously of the important change which had taken place.

Mr. Stanley was a man of much worldly wisdom, prudent and irreproachable in his conduct as a gentleman, a husband, and a father; and, had his responsibilities terminated with this life alone, he would have been one of the most excellent of men. Mrs. Stanley was a weaker agent in doing good, but she also was esteemed an excellent woman: and as they both judged kindly of the world, submitted to its bondage, flattered it, and lived for it, it would have been as unreasonable as ungenerous, had the world refused to look kindly on their faults and follies in return.

“Well, George,” said Mrs. Stanley, seating herself with great satisfaction in one of her large damask chairs, while her husband leaned, in rather a thoughtful attitude, against the mantel-piece—“you must allow that we are happy parents, to lose our favourite child, only to welcome her back again to a home more suited to her taste?”

“We are indeed happy,” replied Mr. Stanley, “but—

“You have always some *but* in the way, with your

excessive prudence," said the mother. "It cannot, however, relate to the character of the husband Eleanor has chosen, for if one could venture to say of any man, he was without a fault, it would certainly be of Frederick Bond."

"He is a man," replied Mr. Stanley, "under whose care any father might feel it a privilege to place his daughter's happiness; his goodness of heart no one can call in question; his prospects, in the way of his profession, are encouraging in the extreme; but, still, in my opinion, he has one fault."

"And pray what may that be?"

"He is rather too fond of dining out."

"Dining out!" exclaimed Mrs. Stanley, "every body dines out, especially bachelors. What can you mean, George?"

"I mean simply this, that the love of dining out may lead to habits extremely objectionable in a medical man. He may, for instance, when called upon to act in some critical case, be altogether unnerved; and the mere fact of his being reputed a man too fond of wine, will be injurious to him as a doctor."

"Yes, my love; but dining out occasionally, and being too fond of wine, are very different things."

"They may be different at first, but they often lead to the same conclusion; and it is of the future I am thinking, not the present."

"That is so like you, George. You are always spoiling the present with anticipations of the future." For my part, I am perfectly satisfied that Eleanor is beginning the world as favourably as any reasonable woman could desire; and with such a family of daughters as ours, you know it is a great thing to have got the

oldest well married before her three and twentieth year."

With feelings of self-gratulation, uninterrupted by reflections more profound, Mrs. Stanley retired to rest; and when she rose in the morning, there was her wonted routine of domestic duties, her morning calls, and the preparation of her daughter's future home, to fill up this, as well as many other days of her existence, leaving no space for anxious or speculative thoughts to encroach upon the tenour of her uneventful life.

The house which Frederick Bond had chosen, was situated in the most genteel part of the town. It had the best entrance, the least objectionable staircase, and decidedly the most approved drawing-room within its sphere of competition. There had been no want of money or of thought bestowed upon its furniture; and it was one of Mrs. Stanley's greatest pleasures, to go and inspect the different apartments, and see how rapidly every thing was advancing towards perfection, preparatory to the travellers' return.

Of all the parties connected with this auspicious event, the bride was, perhaps, the only one who felt the real importance of the step she had taken. Eleanor Stanley had been remarkable as a girl for a seriousness of temperament, and delicacy of conscience, somewhat beyond her years; while, under the direction of a judicious governess, her mind had been partially enlightened by glimpses of duty, and responsibility, and dawnings of hope, which extended beyond the narrow sphere of her daily avocations. She could not, therefore—she dared not, enter upon her present situation, without inwardly resolving that her life should be regulated by some regard to those religious observances, which, however

excellent they might be for herself, she believed were still more necessary for the poor, and for those who would now look up to her as an example. It had been a peculiar satisfaction to her, to find that the companion of her choice entertained the same views of domestic and social duty; and, perhaps, the happiest hours of that period, which the world has been pleased to call the honey-moon, were spent by them in laying down plans for the moral and religious conduct of their future lives.

At the expiration of the appointed time, the expected pair returned; the bride and her bridal dresses to be the wonder and the admiration of her native place; the husband, to feel himself the master of a well-appointed establishment, and one of the happiest men in the world. Nor was there, according to the common ideas and calculations of society, any thing to make him otherwise. He had an extensive and increasing practice; more than an average share of talent, energy, and skill; the good will of numerous friends, and the good fellowship of more; and a wife, a cook, a table, with which the world could find no fault. What could any reasonable man desire beyond?

Frederick Bond had made these calculations a hundred times before; but when he now returned from visiting his patients, and felt himself thoroughly established in his own home, he sunk upon a downy couch, more than ever convinced that he was, beyond all dispute, the happiest of men.

Sunday came, and with their first appearance in public, Mr. and Mrs. Bond enjoyed the opportunity of putting in practice some of their studiously concocted plans for being RATHER religious. They went at precisely the right time to church — neither early nor late; and a



boy in handsome livery walked after them with the books. They dined early; in the afternoon remained at home alone, in order that their servants might go to church; and altogether spent the day so much to their own satisfaction, that they began to wonder how any one could find it either difficult or disagreeable to be religious.

It is sufficient to say of the formal visiting—that tax upon married life—that it was all conducted in the best possible order, and that no breach of good taste could be detected by the most scrutinizing eye, either in the dress of the parties, or the appointment of the new establishment.

Amongst the numerous visitors on this occasion, those who offered their congratulations in the warmest terms, were Sir James and Lady Mornford. It would be difficult to say exactly, by what means these two individuals had obtained their station of pre-eminence in the town of —. But so it was, that no dinner party was complete without Sir James, and no evening entertainment was considered worth dressing for, without his lady.

The gentleman was one of the old English school—one who sat long over his wine, and could rise from table at midnight, apparently as little disordered, as if he had been drinking pure water. He possessed great knowledge of the world, if by this expression we understand a knowledge of rank, title, and precedence, of dress and equipage, of inns, and horses, of field sports, and martial law, and the etiquette of public affairs. Without a rival in knowledge of this description, Sir James Mornford was regarded as a man to be looked up to; while his dignified and gentlemanly manners, accompanied by a fund of spontaneous sarcasm and grave humour, ren-

dered him almost as much feared as he was admired, especially by those who were only novitiates in his peculiar kind of knowledge of the world.

Frederick Bond, along with many of his friends, was often astonished to find himself betrayed into positive servility towards Sir James; and although he stood more erect after detecting himself in this folly, and determined it should be the last of the kind he ever would commit; no sooner had the baronet bestowed upon him some mark of individual favour, than he again fell in with his humour, laughed at his jokes, and courted his attention with as much assiduity as ever.

That Eleanor should have been equally flattered by the friendship of Lady Mornford, was indeed no wonder; for she was one of the most fascinating and amiable of women, if by amiable, we understand a prevailing disposition to think kindly of others, with a desire to be loved, at least as much as she was capable of loving. Had Lady Mornford been told that this capability did not extend beyond the usual limits of human affection, she would have resented the information as at once injurious and insulting, for she believed herself to be *all heart*; but in her little sphere of philosophy, she had not perceived the difference between impulse and feeling. She was, however, so beautiful, so bewitching in her manners and appearance, that few could withstand her fascinations. She was neither highly talented, nor highly accomplished. The secret of her influence seemed to be a sort of intuitive knowledge of the restrictions and requirements of good breeding; so that while others were studying every means, and watching every opportunity to acquit themselves with propriety, she could allow herself the license of her own impetuous nature, without once transgressing

those mysterious laws, about which the middle or lower grades of society are often so painfully solicitous.

Eleanor Bond could never discover how it was, that her drawing-room, with all the pains she bestowed upon it, looked so decidedly inferior to Lady Mornford's; and with regard to dress, her own resembled too much the well-assorted flowers in a garden; while those of Lady Mornford, composed as it was of colours which few people would have ventured upon, was more in keeping with the graceful luxuriance of nature. Her laugh too, was so wild and musical, yet so unquestionably genuine, that she could spread the infection of merriment wherever she went; while her prompt and impetuous answers, her arch smile and playful drollery, seldom failed to win back again the friends whom her careless raillery might otherwise have driven effectually away.

Whatever faults Sir James and his lady might possess, they had one redeeming quality—for they were tenderly and devotedly attached to each other. There existed between them an affection which caprice had not been able to alienate; which time, for they were neither of them young, had not wasted away; and which, in the midst of false excitement, and falsehood of almost every kind, had remained to them as the only thing real with which they were acquainted. Such were the friends whom Frederick Bond and his amiable bride determined to make their own, and in this object they succeeded beyond their most sanguine hopes.

Persons addicted to favouritism have usually a favourite medical attendant. Lady Mornford made a point of either loving or hating every body; though her hatred was so entirely a matter of profession, that it seldom extended to thinking or speaking evil of any one. Mr.

West, the partner of Frederick Bond, was an exception to her rule of extremes; for he was a man whom it was impossible to dislike; though his cold and formal manners had too much the effect of repulsion, for Lady Mornford not to express, in the warmest terms, her preference for the junior partner.

Mrs. West, too, was no favourite either with Lady Mornford or with Eleanor. Her ladyship used to say, there was a tacit reproach in the prudent silence of this gentle and simple-hearted woman, which she never could bear; while Eleanor felt, a little too sensibly, the contrast between the habits of Mrs. West and her own.

"There can be no occasion for Mrs. West to dress so plainly," she would often say, "it looks like affectation. Good people ought never to be singular."

"But she gives a great deal to the poor," observed an acquaintance, one day as they were conversing on this subject; and she enumerated many acts of charity, with which the world in general was unacquainted.

"She must, indeed," said Eleanor, "be very generous." And her conscience smote her with the conviction of her own deficiencies; for the scale on which she had commenced her housekeeping, left little for charitable purposes. "Mrs. West must be very generous. But there is a prudent, and an imprudent charity; and there is a style of giving that is out of all keeping—beyond all proportion—"

"Beyond all proportion with what?" inquired her friend, "with your charities, or mine?" And she laughed so heartily at the happiness of her own observations, that Eleanor felt more annoyed than ever by the unquestionable merits of Mrs. West.

This friend, if friend she might be called, was one of

those who establish intimacies without affection. She had, consequently, outlived so many, that when she first made advances of a social nature to the newly married couple, they determined not to be drawn into the snare. Miss Masterman possessed, however, the strong recommendation of being excellent in an evening party, for she could flirt with the gentlemen, laugh at the ladies, and render herself entertaining to all. Alone, with one person, she was too harsh, or too laboriously brilliant to produce any pleasing effect; but as some of those gorgeous flowers, which, when gathered, are glaring and painful to the eye, may yet adorn the parterre, she found a place in society, and was thought to mingle well with the softer or more temperate varieties of human character.

Such then were the associates whom Eleanor drew around her.—Lady Mornford, because she was the fashion; Miss Masterman, because she made her drawing-room more attractive.

And now the formal visiting had all been gone through, when Frederick Bond proposed, all things being settled, to have a gentleman's dinner party—only a few friends—just the choice set with whom he had been accustomed to dine in his bachelor days, and who now indulged themselves in many a sarcasm at his expense, because he had lately refused to join them in the accustomed manner. For some weeks, nay months, he found himself so happy, that he felt no need of their society; but certain hints began to find their way to his ear, that he was no longer his own master; that he could not, if he would, invite them, and, worse than all, that he wished to save his wine. There was no bearing this. He resolved to give a dinner, at which they should all be

convinced, that, though his wine was worth some care, he had no desire to spare it.

It was difficult to make Eleanor fully understand the nature of this dinner. She wished to have Mr. and Mrs. West invited; and though her husband earnestly requested her to make no addition to the party he had named, not liking to be the only lady at table, she requested, as a particular favour, that Miss Masterman would come and assist her through the day. It was a great pleasure to her, to superintend the arrangement of every thing precisely to her husband's satisfaction; to spare no expense in procuring exactly what was, then in season, and to hear him say, on returning home to dress for dinner, that she had left him nothing to ask, or to wish for.

"But, why is Miss Masterman here, my love? and your sister?"

"I asked them to come and assist me."

Frederick bit his lip. "You must get them away early, Eleanor; and remember, I never lay a charge upon you without reason. I would rather have given fifty pounds, than that you should have disobliged me in this."

"I thought," said Eleanor meekly, "that you liked Miss Masterman; and my sister can offend no one."

"Miss Masterman is a snake in the grass, Eleanor; and your sister may tell tales, if she cannot invent them."

The last words were spoken in an under tone, but, even had they been more audible, they would only have added to Eleanor's astonishment, for the whole affair was a mystery to her; and had not her husband cleared his brow, and spoken kindly to her again, she would pro-

bably have added to her former imprudence, by immediately sending the unwelcome guests away.

The hour of meeting arrived, and Frederick Bond had scarcely more pride in introducing his lovely wife, than in the perfect adjustment of every thing relating to the dinner. Sir James Mornford, of course, was one of the guests, and he evinced his satisfaction by being in the best possible humour. He was a grave—some said a deep feeling man; but of that the world had little proof, for to no one being alone was his heart laid open. He seldom praised any thing, for his forte seemed to lie in quiet sarcasm. Yet, while others exhausted their eloquence in profuse encomium, he, with a few looks, and tones of approbation, could at any time reward the endeavours of those who sought to give him pleasure. Thus, to have had Sir James to dine, and to have had him in good humour, was a thing to be told of the next day, as the highest honour which the town of — afforded.

To this honour, Frederick Bond was peculiarly alive on the present occasion, as well as to all other sources of satisfaction. His dinner was excellent, his wines were approved; and when the ladies rose to leave the table, he seemed to have nothing left to wish for beneath the sun.

While he and his guests were enjoying themselves to their heart's content, Eleanor, her sister, and Miss Masterman, began to feel the time hang heavily on their hands. They opened the piano, but there was no audience to hear them play. They took out their worsted work, but still an involuntary yawn betrayed at intervals that they thought the evening both long and dull: nor was their situation rendered more agreeable by hearing peals of laughter from the dining-room below.

"The gentlemen appear to be merry," observed Miss Masterman; "I have heard that Sir James, when he has taken a pretty liberal quantity of wine, is one of the most entertaining companions imaginable, not, however, so merry himself, as the cause of mirth to other men. But of all persons under such circumstances, I have the greatest horror of the little gentleman who sat on your right hand. I am told, he thinks nothing of chasing the ladies from room to room, and that neither age nor dignity are secure from his impertinence."

All this was a new style of conversation to Eleanor. In her father's house there had been no dinner parties for gentlemen alone; and she had, hitherto, been ignorant enough to believe, that to be, what is called affected by wine, a man must make some sacrifice of his dignity, if not of his character, as a gentleman. What then was her astonishment, to hear the laughter from the dining-room grow louder, coarser, and in every way less like the sounds that might be expected to celebrate the meeting of rational and enlightened men. There were songs, too, at first deep and full-toned, but afterwards in broken voices, and all the while she felt that Miss Masterman's keen searching eyes were fixed full upon her face, while her ear was set for listening, and her smile seemed at intervals to say, "Do you hear that?"

"Let us have tea," said Eleanor, and she rang the bell with violence, glad of any thing that would make a bustle, and help to drown the discord below.

"Tell your master," said Eleanor to the footman, "that coffee waits in the drawing-room."

The footman did not return, and the three ladies sat and sipped their tea in almost unbroken silence.



In the course of an hour, Eleanor renewed her message to the gentlemen, but still no answer, and both tea and coffee were growing cold. At last, about eleven o'clock, the dining-room door was heard to open, and a creaking step came deliberately up the stairs.

The gentleman who entered, was a philosopher, or rather a man of science; and the ladies consequently felt it incumbent upon them, to reach the highest range of their own intellect, for a subject on which to engage his attention. He had bowed to them with great majesty on approaching the table, and having taken a seat, he looked rather vaguely, this way, and that, but still not a word was spoken.

"I suppose it is the way with men of genius," thought Eleanor, "to have nothing to say to ladies," but yet, as the mistress of the house, she thought it necessary to make some further attempt. In vain she tried the effect of common-place. Still there was no answer. The gentleman, however, took the coffee that was handed to him, and not the coffee alone, for he poured out the cream, until both cup and saucer were filled.

"It is one of the singularities of clever men," thought Eleanor, in the simplicity of her heart; and again she searched through her own little store of scientific information to find something more fitting the occasion, and more worthy of being said. At last she thought of something.

"Pray Dr. —" she asked, "what is your opinion of animal magnetism? Do you think it possible that the nervous system should be affected by laws so mysterious; or do you consider it a deception altogether?"

Still there was no answer. Eleanor looked in the gentleman's face. He had raised his coffee to his lips,

and a pair of little black twinkling eyes were winking at her over the edge of the cup; while a nod more than familiar, convinced her, that although wise men might sometimes look singular, singularity did not always look wise.

Miss Masterman understood the case better. She had understood it from the beginning; and she was more than rewarded for the dull evening she had spent, by the rich treasure she hoped to lay up for the amusement of future evenings elsewhere.

The next outlet from the dining-room was of a very different description. It was a complete explosion. Amongst the screams of the maid-servants, the laughter of the footmen, and the derangement of all the furniture in the hall, in shot the little gentleman, the terror of all nervous ladies, the delight of all stable-boys and grooms.

The sister of Mrs. Bond was a sweet-looking girl of sixteen; gentle, and timid as a young dove, she was exactly the kind of subject the little gentleman was wont to choose for his boisterous and absurd attentions.

Eleanor looked on with astonishment equalled only by her indignation. The maternal feelings of an elder sister rose in her heart, and glowed upon her cheek as she saw the poor girl struggling, almost in tears, beneath his familiar and insulting treatment. One of her attempts to escape had rent her white muslin frock from the top to the bottom, and her hair, which she usually wore arranged around her brow with classic order, was torn from its bandage, and lay loose and flowing upon her neck.

Eleanor could bear it no longer. Towering high with the majesty of insulted feelings, she advanced towards the

offender, and demanded, in the most imperative tone she had ever assumed, how he dared to treat a lady, and her sister, in such a manner.

It was a scene which Miss Masterman was often afterwards heard to describe as being worthy of Hogarth ; for while Eleanor stood, beyond her usual height, in this commanding attitude, the little gentleman, not in the slightest degree daunted by her authoritative manner, let go his former prize, and seizing both her hands, compelled her to perform various rapid evolutions round the drawing-room ; during which, notwithstanding the giddiness of her brain, and the agony of her vexation, Eleanor retained the power of perceiving, that through the partial opening of the door, the footmen and servant maids were peeping, and giggling, having been attracted to the spot by the unusual sounds, and the well-known reputation of the gentleman for producing scenes.

Happily for the mistress of the house, the group collected there were more in keeping with the little gentleman's present humour ; and by a sudden bound, which upset a marble table, on which were placed a choice collection of fancy ornaments, he darted forth amongst the domestics, and sent them screaming and laughing to every quarter of the house.

To describe the feelings with which Eleanor gathered up her own and her sister's dishevelled locks, would be impossible. What could she do ? She did what all women do when they have no other resource, she sat down and wept. That her husband should leave her to be the subject of such gross and violent insult, was the prevailing thought amongst many bitter ones that filled her mind.

"What can your master be doing," she said to the only servant who approached her with serious commise-

ration. "What can your master be doing, that he does not come to my help." Go and tell him that he must come to me in the drawing-room immediately. And in the mean time she locked the door, and sat down and wept again.

In vain Miss Masterman assured her it was all nothing, nothing but play—not worthy of a thought, still less of a tear—that such things were perpetually occurring, and that when gentlemen dined together, they must of necessity occur. It was a style of reasoning which found no echo in Eleanor's unsophisticated mind, and, but for the dread of exposing the disorder of her household, she would, even at that late hour, have sent for her father to protect her.

It is not necessary to trace the events of that night to a later period. Well would it be if the oblivion, which on such occasions wraps the senses of some, could extend itself to all. The guests may depart, the servants may retire, but the wife must bear the presence of her husband; and that hour of seclusion, that chamber of rest, in which the full hearts of the happy are accustomed to unburden themselves, must become the scene of horror and repulsion.

Eleanor Bond had been accustomed to regard her husband as the most perfect specimen of manly beauty. Not the colours of the painter, who ventures to portray the inhabitants of heaven, could be more bright or more pure, than the light in which she viewed him—in which she had viewed him, until that melancholy night, when he lay before her a grovelling mass of humanity—not dead, for he was still distorted by muscular convulsion, though no longer animated by a soul. Hitherto his presence, even when both were silent, had seemed to fill

the room in which they lived and breathed together. He was near her still, but, oh ! she was so lonely ! she had been accustomed to feel safe, if she could but touch his hand, or know that he was within hearing of her voice ; but there he lay, inanimate, and gross, and she, the subject of indignity and insult, had no one to defend her—she, his once honoured wife, and mistress of his house, was left to be the plaything of rude men, and the object of pity to her own domestics ! It was a fearful breaking down of the strong barrier which her love had built around him. She slept not that night ; and when he awoke at a late hour in the morning, he found that the pillow where her head had rested was still moistened by her tears.

Eleanor herself rose earlier than her servants, and being unable to settle to any occupation, she walked from room to room, and at last found her way into that in which the gentlemen had dined. The curtains were still closed, though daylight was struggling through. She drew them aside, and, throwing open the shutters, looked out upon a little plot of garden-ground, where the crisp frost of an autumnal morning was yet white upon the grass. After gazing for some time upon the distant woods, and the cornfields now stripped of their golden treasure, she turned to inspect the apartment, the secrets of which had not yet been revealed to her view.

One dying lamp was still smoking, and crackling in its socket. The rest had burned themselves out. The flowers she had gathered and arranged the day before, were withered, and strewed upon the floor. Glasses had rolled from their places, and pools of wine lay black upon the table. Chairs were heaped together in strange confusion ; and in one part of the room the carpet was torn from the boards, as if some heavy substance had

been violently dragged along the ground. It was a sickening sight, to one who knew that all this was the result, not of accident, but of premeditated grossness and excess.

When Eleanor met her husband at a late breakfast that morning, she felt so deeply his disgrace, that she could not for worlds have alluded to the transactions of the past night. Fearing he might suspect, that, although she did not speak of them, she was still making them the subject of her thoughts, she talked abruptly and rapidly about other things, as though her attention was wholly occupied with affairs that were, in reality, foreign to the minds of both ; nor did she venture to look into her husband's face. As if she had been the transgressor—as if it was her peculiar part to feel ashamed—she studiously avoided meeting his eye. Only once, when his head had been bent down, and she had watched him with more than her wonted tenderness, he suddenly looked up, and detected her with the tears just starting to her eyes.

It was a moment of painful embarrassment to both ; but it passed over, and Eleanor talked rapidly again about Lady Mornford, who had sent that morning to request that Frederick would pay her a visit at an early hour, and if he met Sir James, he was charged to tell him that he had come to see one of the children, who was slightly indisposed.

Frederick was scarcely in a fit state for an interview with any one, more especially to be consulted on any subject requiring serious and connected thought. His temples throbbed, his hand trembled, and he was tormented with a restless impatience, which he feared would render it impossible for him to sit and hear the long stories mothers are so apt to tell about the ailments

of their children. There was, however, no alternative. He must go; so he swallowed another cup of strong coffee, and left the house.

Arrived at the residence of Lady Mornford, he was ushered into a little study adjoining her bed-room, where she brought to him her youngest child, and descanted long and eloquently upon the symptoms of latent disease which it had recently evinced. He thought her looks and manner peculiar, but it might be the disorder of his own nerves, and the beating headache that seemed to bewilder his brain; still it was not natural for her to stop suddenly, and look grave, as she often did on this occasion, though she gave utterance at intervals to an unusual quantity of playful nonsense.

At last she rang the bell, ordered the child to be taken away, and when she had seen that the door was closed, took a long breath, and sat down again.

"I dare say, Mr. Bond," she said, "you will think me extremely weak; I know I am fanciful, and take up strange notions about things I do not understand. But I suppose you are accustomed to this sort of thing; you meet with many silly women besides me, don't you?" And she looked into his face with one of her arch and playful smiles.

"If all folly," said Frederick, "was as pleasant to bear with as yours,"—

"Hush! hush Mr. Bond," she said with an air of mock gravity, "You know you are come to see me as a doctor, and I don't pay for compliments."

"But you are not ill. It is impossible," said he, attempting to feel her pulse.

"You will discover nothing here," she replied, displaying her beautiful fairy hand. "You men of wisdom are

sadly deficient on some points. You would say of me, for instance, that I was in perfect health."

Frederick looked more earnestly in her face. Time had dealt so gently with her beauty, that she might still have been called young, for her rich dark hair, amongst which a few silver threads might with difficulty have been detected, still flowed in natural curls around her brow, and the shadow of her long eyelashes still fell upon a cheek that wore the bloom of Hebe.

Convinced that she had no serious object in detaining him, Frederick at last rose to depart, when her countenance at once assumed a change. She looked more than serious, and almost gasped for breath, as if making some desperate effort to speak.

"My dear Lady Mornford," said Frederick, deeply affected. "Do tell me what is the matter: tell me as a friend, if you cannot tell me as a doctor, and I will serve you in either capacity, to the utmost of my power."

"I know it is all imagination," said she, "I am the weakest creature on earth, or I should never dream of such a thing—you will be quite angry with me for troubling you about so mere a trifle, but I cannot divest myself of the idea—that—that I have a cancer."

She burst into a wild hysterical laugh, when she had uttered these words, and it was with the greatest difficulty that she could be prevailed upon to speak seriously again, or to behave with anything like composure.

In the course of another hour, Frederick Bond was seated in his own private study, his head resting on his clasped hands, his lips compressed, and his whole attitude indicating the most intense and earnest thought.

At the same time, in the apartment of Lady Mornford, nothing was heard but hysterical sobs, while her



terrified attendants applied those stimulants, and restoratives, to which she was but too much accustomed.

"These then," said Frederick Bond, awakening from his reverie, "are the stern realities of life. Upon this exquisite being, whom time has passed by without daring to touch, disease has laid his fatal and polluting hand."

Unnerved as he was, and painfully alive to images of horror, the subject assumed a more frightful character than he could bear to contemplate. He was faint and feeble with the excesses of the past day, and a habit, for the consequences of which he felt no apprehension, had lately enabled him to find the stimulus for which he felt so frequent a craving, close at hand, and safe under lock and key in his own apartment.

It had been the subject of observation with some of Frederick's more serious friends, before he married, that he was in danger of being led away by what is called a fondness for convivial meetings; but no sooner was that auspicious event announced, than he was considered a safe man for all his future life. No single individual, except himself, could be aware to what degree his fondness had extended. Each of his friends beheld him only at particular times under the influence of wine; but he knew, or might have known, if he would have acknowledged it to himself, that the sum total of his excesses was at least double what any one else suspected.

Nor was it at the dinner-table alone, that temptation assailed him. He was a great favourite with the country people, amongst whom much of his practice lay; and there were cold stormy rides often to be performed in the night, which seemed to demand, as a mere act of common hospitality, that he should be fortified against the inclemency of the weather by some potent draught.

There were long visits, too, which must of necessity be paid, to places distant and dreary, where he, and the good man of the house, would while away the weary hours, by filling their glasses again, and again, till they scarcely heard the pelting of the storm, or knew that there was any thing on earth beyond the blazing fire, and half-empty bottle beside them.

In each of these instances, the partaker in Frederick Bond's conviviality, believed the excess of that particular occasion to be an exception to his general rule of conduct ; and thus his character remained unblemished as a whole.

It is wonderful how the silence of the world can lull the conscience to sleep. It is equally wonderful how the reproaches of the world can at once awaken it to more than life. In none of the vices to which human nature is liable, is this more evident than in the vice of intemperance. If every separate act of inebriety which a man commits, was, from the earliest commencement, known and treated justly by society, he would be defended by a host of witnesses. But, unfortunately, it is only when he has gone too far, when conviction has lost the power to save him, though it still retains the power to strike, that the world speaks home, and treats him, in this hopeless stage of degradation, as it ought to have treated him at first.

Frederick Bond had gone further than he himself was aware of, for he had entered upon the fatal practice of drinking in secrecy, and alone. He had often wished, as he sat in his study, a prey to that nervous debility consequent upon excess, that he could obtain, without being observed, the stimulus which both mind and body seemed to crave ; and one Sunday afternoon, when all the rest of the household were gone to church, he employed himself

in conveying from his cellar to his study, a sufficient supply to last him for some weeks.

We will not say how little of the dignity of a man or a Christian he felt, while engaged in this occupation. The certainty that no eye beheld him—that most fatal, and most delusive opiate by which the human soul is drugged—the certainty that no eye beheld him, gave strength to his purpose at the time, and calmness to his after-recollections of what he had done.

It was not many weeks after the meeting of the party already described, that Sir James Mornford invited the same guests to dine at his own house. Eleanor received the intelligence that her husband intended to accept this invitation, like some sudden shock which left her scarcely power to speak. She felt herself trembling all over, when she returned the note to her husband without a word, for she was so often told that her scruples on this subject arose entirely from her ignorance of the world, that she determined to be silent; nor was it any real apprehension for the future that now disturbed her peace, but simply a sort of instinctive dread of witnessing what she considered, as the degradation of the being she most admired on earth. Of his finally, and totally yielding to any gross or vicious propensity, she entertained not the shadow of a fear.

On the morning of the day when this visit was to be paid, Eleanor was even more than usually attentive to her husband's wants and wishes; and when he came home to dress for the party, she lingered about him as if his every word and look was to be his last.

It was quite natural that, under such circumstances, he should feel a little annoyed by her attentions, and he was, consequently, more silent, and more abrupt when

he did speak, than usual. He was glad to hasten through the duties of his toilet, and when all was completed, he took leave of his wife so slightly, and so coldly, that she called him back again on some trivial pretext, and folding her arms around his neck, burst into tears.

"What can be the matter with you, Eleanor?" he said. "I am in haste, you must let me go."

She still detained him, however, until she had whispered in his ear her earnest request that he would return home early.

"I am not well," she added, "and I shall be so nervous."

"You are a foolish creature," he answered, rather contemptuously, and, forcing her arms from their hold, "Come, come, Eleanor," he said, "Don't make such a child of yourself. I must go, I shall be too late."

With that he pressed a hasty kiss upon her forehead, and was gone in a moment, stopping only on the stairs to say in a loud and hurried voice, "You had better go to rest at the usual time; Saunders will let me in."

It was a long and gloomy day to Eleanor, the more so, that she dreaded having incurred her husband's displeasure and contempt, by giving way to the feelings of her heart; and she resolved again, and again, to be wiser for the future, and to keep her anxieties and fears to herself.

The evening came, and she was weary of her work, and yet feared to go, as she often did, to sit with her mother and her sisters, lest they should discover where her husband was gone; for strange stories having got abroad about the scenes which took place on the occasion of Sir James Mornford dining with her husband, had induced her father to caution him, rather severely, against too intimate an association with that gentleman.

These considerations detained her in her silent home, where the hours dragged so heavily along, that more than once she bent her ear to the time-piece, to ascertain whether it had really stopped. It had, after much watching, reached the eleventh hour, when Eleanor was startled by a thundering knock at the door, and the footman hastened up stairs to say that a man from the country had come for Mr. Bond to go immediately, his child having been seized with the croup, and lying, as he believed, at the point of death.

"Send him to Mr. West," said Eleanor.

The man galloped down the street, and the houses were not so distant, but that Eleanor, by opening the window, could hear him repeat his heavy knock. To her astonishment he came back again with double speed. Mr. West was sitting up with a dying patient, and his assistant was not at home.

The fact was, Frederick Bond had said nothing to his partner about expecting to be out that evening, and, therefore, no provision had been made for supplying his place.

"Go, instantly, to Sir James Mornford's for your master," said Eleanor, "it is but half a mile."

The man looked inquiringly, but said nothing. She repeated her command, and he went down stairs, muttering all the way, that it would be of no sort of use, for that by this time, his master would be more likely to kill a child, than cure it; but he went, nevertheless, and, in about half an hour Sir James Mornford's carriage drove up to the door, and a mass of something scarcely like humanity was lifted into the hall.

Eleanor hastened to explain to her husband the necessity there was for his instantly preparing to accompany

the farmer, who now insisted, in no gentle terms, that his summons should be promptly obeyed. But the look of gross stupidity, and the idiotic laugh with which Frederick Bond responded to his wife, convinced her that she had failed to reach his understanding; and she patiently began the task of explanation a second time, though with less hope of success.

"My dear Frederick," she said, leading him by the arm into an apartment where they could converse unheard, for she saw that the footman was making merry at his master's expense. "My own dear Frederick, I entreat you to listen to me. Tell me first, what is good for a child in the croup, and I will send this man away before he wakes all the neighbours."

"A child in the croup?" said the doctor, drawling as if he had lost all command over the muscles of his mouth. "Put him in a warm bath; and, Eleanor," he added, calling back his wife after she had reached the door, "see—see—that they don't boil him—that's all."

Eleanor went out into the street, and advancing meekly to the side of the impatient farmer, told him, that her husband was not quite ready; that he strongly recommended a warm-bath for the child, and that the best thing he could do, was to ride home and see that the remedy was administered, while Mr. Bond would prepare to follow immediately.

"Warm bath, or no warm bath," said the farmer, "I don't stir from this place without a doctor of some kind with me. It is not as if we were parish paupers, and bound to one man, like those who can't pay their own way; but, if Mr. Bond does not choose to come, I know those who will."

In short, the man was altogether impracticable, and

Eleanor had no other alternative, but to return to the house, from whence she despatched the servant to prepare his master's horse and gig, in the shortest possible space of time ; while she took down his hat and coat, and would gladly have assisted him to put them on, but that he held her hand so tightly, she could only stand still and hear all the foolish things he chose to utter. It was like a waking night-mare to poor Eleanor ; for the farmer, at intervals, was thundering more and more loudly at the door, and the neighbours were beginning to open their shutters and look out, while she had no power to release herself, or in any way to ameliorate the sufferings of her situation.

At last the servant, having driven up to the door with the gig, came in to her assistance. Their joint efforts, however, could not, for some time, induce the doctor to put his coat on the right way. He persisted in pushing in his arms with the front behind ; and, in this manner, assuming all the mock majesty he could, he staggered up and down the hall, arguing that it was the most rational and approved method of preserving the chest from cold.

Eleanor had hitherto kept her patience, and spoken kindly ; but piqued with the merriment of Saunders, who was enjoying the jest to his heart's content, she adopted a different tone. " Frederick," she said, " if you will compel me to despise you, spare me, at least, the pain of seeing you despised by your own servants."

These words succeeded in awakening some degree of feeling. With no other answer than a grimace, the doctor, by many zig-zag movements, succeeded in reaching the door ; and was finally assisted by Saunders to his accustomed place in the carriage, where he soon fell into a heavy sleep, from which, had the way been shorter, it would have been impossible to arouse him at the neces-

sary time for action. Happily for his credit, they had to ride seven long miles, so that by the time the farmer opened for them the last gate, Saunders was able to recognize some signs of life in the slumbering form beside him; and he effected his own, and his master's descent from the carriage, without any observations being made upon his real situation.

Perhaps it was that the simple inmates of the rural dwelling were too much occupied with their own feelings, to make observations upon others. The child was dead; and while the neighbouring gossips were adjusting the bed on which it lay, pressing down the eyelids, and straightening the little hands that were never more to be stretched forth with the eager grasp of impatient youth, the mother sat rocking herself to and fro before the fire, taking no notice of any one, but occasionally wiping her eyes with the corner of her apron, and then folding it silently before her face, until some fresh spring of sorrow should be opened, and her tears should flow more abundantly again.

The only thing which roused her attention, was the sound of her husband's step in the outer apartment. She rose to meet him, and throwing her arms around his neck, wept more bitterly than ever.

"Stand off!" said the farmer, pushing away the women who crowded about him; and, bent only upon ascertaining one fact, he added, "One of you speak at once, and tell me exactly at what time it was all over."

"Not half an hour after you were gone," said three voices together.

"It is well," he replied, while quietly approaching the bed, and laying his broad hand upon the silky hair of his child, as gently as if it had been a butterfly alighting



on a rose, he stooped down, and murmured in broken accents, "My pretty fellow—it is indeed all over with thee." Then standing erect, he added, "It is well for me that I am not put upon my revenge, as I should have been, had he died through that man's delay, for I would have blazoned it through the country, so that he should never have had a patient again."

On arriving at the farmer's door, Frederick Bond had been so far restored to consciousness, as to be able to go through the usual forms of civility or duty expected from a doctor on such occasions, without betraying any decided symptoms of alienation of mind; and, thanks to the care of his wife and servant, he was so muffled in capes and cravats, that the expression of his countenance would not have been easily detected, even by more scrutinizing eyes than those around him. The farmer, it is true, regarded him with no very charitable feeling; but it was only on the score of neglect, that his wrath had been moved; and as that neglect was proved to have been of no importance to the life of his child, he offered him the usual civilities of his house, merely observing, as he followed him to the door, that it was well to look sharply to such matters; and that there was as good practice to be lost or won in that neighbourhood, as any doctor need desire.

Frederick Bond awoke at a late hour on the following morning, with more distinct recollections of the transactions of the past night, than he had any desire to retain. He descended to the breakfast-room nervous and irritable; and when he met the inquiring eye of his wife, he felt as if he would have given all he had in the world, to bribe her not to ask him a single question. Her kindness too annoyed him. Her presence, her very existence, was at that moment a burden. And yet she spoke as

sweetly, and was as solicitous to please him as ever. All her endeavours, however, were unequal to draw him into any thing like connected conversation, especially on the subject of the farmer's child. At last her curiosity overcame her prudence, and she ventured to ask directly, whether the child was living when he arrived.

"No," was the laconic reply.

Eleanor laid down her knife and fork, and gazing intently on her husband, exclaimed involuntarily, "What a pity you were so long in going!"

"It was no pity at all," said her husband, "and, besides, I was not long in going. The child would have been dead if I had flown. It did not live half an hour after the man had left his own house."

"Let us thank God!" said Eleanor, laying her hand upon her husband's arm. "Let us both return thanks, that it was not through your neglect this life was lost; and let this merciful and timely warning be a caution to you, dear Frederick, for the future."

"Nonsense!" said her husband, shaking off the hand which pressed too earnestly upon his arm. "Give me another cup of coffee, and don't talk about what it is not your business to understand."

Eleanor had never been so ungraciously repulsed by her husband before. She felt that burning tears were in her eyes, but instead of yielding to her feelings, she silently formed a deep and fatal resolution, that this should be the last time she would ever even hint to him her consciousness of that growing evil, which was already beginning to make fearful inroads upon her domestic peace.

## CHAP. II.

## DANGERS OF DINING OUT.

It was about three years after the time of which we have written, that Eleanor Bond was attacked with a serious and alarming illness. She was the mother of three hopeful children, the youngest of which was but a few weeks old, when the distracted father implored the assistance of Mrs. West, to come and take the superintendence of the sick-room of his wife.

Mrs. West, who was a retiring and unobtrusive woman, naturally hesitated, particularly as the mother and sisters of the suffering patient were so near.

"But you know," said Frederick, "that Mrs. Stanley is no nurse. Her bustling habits create a perfect tumult wherever she comes; and as for the girls, they are too young and thoughtless to be of the slightest service in any case of emergency."

Mrs. West still hesitated.

"I see you have some other reason," said Frederick, "Let me intreat you not to allow any feeling of false delicacy to interfere with the natural goodness of your heart."

"I trust," said Mrs. West, "it is not false delicacy that keeps me back, but, to speak plainly, I have no reason to believe that any attentions from me would be acceptable to Mrs. Bond: you know she has never—"

"Oh! don't think of that," interrupted Frederick, "don't think of it now. "She is perfectly unconscious at this moment of all that passes around her; yet the flutter of

so many inexperienced nurses, greatly increases the delirium under which she labours. Never can I forget your untiring solicitude for me, when I was ill under your roof, and entirely dependent on your care. As you value my temporal and eternal happiness, let me prevail upon you to come and take charge of my wife for a day, for a single hour each day, or at least, for as long a time as you can be spared from your own family."

Mrs. West immediately despatched a note to her husband. She then visited the different departments of her household, and in the course of half an hour was standing silently by the restless couch of Eleanor Bond, having requested every one else either to leave the apartment, or to maintain the strictest order and quiet.

Nor had it been a difficult task to obtain this release from injudicious attentions. One had urgent calls of duty at home, another had duties equally urgent abroad, and all were easily prevailed upon to leave the sick-room, under the conviction that their absence would be more than supplied by Mrs. West.

Silent and peaceful was the chamber of suffering now, except for the fitful wanderings of the restless invalid; who, lost to the consciousness of reality on almost every other point, was possessed with the belief that some gentle spirit from a better world, had come down to minister to her necessities.

Fully aware of the prejudice existing against her in the mind of Eleanor Bond, Mrs. West had carefully avoided obtruding herself upon her notice. With a noiseless step, she had glided around her bed, and even when she raised her head, or adjusted her pillows, she had often concealed her own face behind the curtains, lest her countenance meek and fair and placid as it was, should displease

or offend. With inexpressible satisfaction, however, she soon discovered that in her new character, she was not recognized as the repulsive being from whom Eleanor had so often turned away, to seek for friendship that was not worthy to be weighed in the balance with what hers might have been ; and while the unconscious patient fondly bestowed upon her the appellation of a good angel, refusing everything that was not offered by her hand, it might have awakened a smile on a countenance less grave than hers, to think of the disparity there was between her angelic nature, and the menial offices it now became her pleasure to perform.

Mrs. West was not one of those ladies who leave everything to servants. In the present instance she had tried them first, and finding they did not move the chairs and fire-irons so quietly as she wished, she arranged the whole apartment herself, swept up the hearth with her own hands, and attended to every call, so as scarcely to allow a servant to enter the room.

With what happiness did Frederick Bond observe the effect of this mode of treatment in tranquillizing the mind of the patient ; and when he first witnessed the childish fondness which she was beginning to entertain for her unknown visitant, his eyes involuntarily filled with tears, while he paid the true homage to virtue which its own nature demands, by inwardly regretting that his wife had not chosen this excellent woman for her only friend.

As a youth, Frederick had spent many years under the roof of Mrs. West. In health and in sickness, in joy and in sorrow, he had proved her value as a mother and a friend ; yet although he had often urged upon his wife the " desirableness of cultivating her acquaintance," he had, with

strange contradiction, encouraged her to adopt such habits as he knew must be destructive of all intimacy with a woman of her character.

Frederick Bond was much altered since he stood before the altar with his blushing bride, himself the happiest of men. He was much altered, for his temper had become irritable, and his kindness fitful and inconstant. His appearance, too, had undergone a change for the worse, which it would have been difficult to define. He was still handsome, but his countenance had lost its harmony, and its truth. There was a want of consistency and correspondence in his features. The eye did not answer to the forehead, and the expression of the mouth was uncertain, and false to both. There had lately been whisperings abroad amongst his patients, that he was not always quite himself. Some laughed at his oddities, and made them public under the character of profound secrets; while a few, more scrupulous, declared it was trifling with human life, to place it in his hands.

Some scattered hints of this description had reached the ear of his wife, and still she forbore to speak. She had listened to them with that terrible shrinking of the soul with which we crouch under some impending and inevitable calamity; but still she concealed her apprehensions within her own bosom; and as the traveller who is far from shelter, looks back upon the thunder-storm that comes rolling after him, and persuades himself it will not, cannot be so cruel as to burst upon his head, so she looked around from the fancied eminence on which she believed herself to stand, and hoped, and trusted, that the floods of dark waters would never overtake her.

Mrs. West had so thoroughly established herself in the sick chamber, that a week elapsed without her having

made more than occasional visits to her own house, where all things were so well arranged, and conducted with such regularity, that the main spring of order might even be withdrawn for a time, and the machinery would continue to move on in its habitual manner.

At the expiration of a week, the naturally good constitution of the patient began to rally. She exhibited signs of returning reason, and often fixed her eyes upon Mrs. West in an earnest and inquiring manner, as if to discover by what abuse of her faculties she had converted her into an angel.

"You cannot imagine, Frederick," said she, one day, when her husband was alone with her, "what unaccountable fancies I have had in this illness. Do you know, I actually believed there was some beautiful spirit sent down to earth, to attend upon me; and, behold! it is nothing but Mrs. West."

"You have probably done more justice to Mrs. West in your illness, than you ever did before," replied her husband very gravely. "She has indeed been a ministering angel to you; and if returning life be a blessing at all, it is certainly a blessing, which under Heaven, you owe to her exertions."

"And is it not a blessing, Frederick, to behold you again—to have you near me—to hear you speak—and to know that you love me still?"

"It might be a blessing," said Frederick in a mournful tone. "I wish it was a blessing to you; but I sometimes think——" And he murmured between his teeth, that "it will prove in the end to have been nothing but a curse."

Eleanor at that moment remembered her resolution, or she would have thrown her arms around his neck, and implored him to put away the only bane of her

felicity, and render the happiness of her life complete. Eleanor Bond had awakened from delirium with a childlike consciousness, confined merely to present things. Her first conviction had been, that she was not in her accustomed chamber. Then the coverlid of the bed attracted her attention; but chiefly her patient and untiring nurse, whom she followed with her eyes wherever she went. At last she recollected that she was a mother. What a world of happiness was unfolded to her with that blessed thought! Life was worth regaining when it came back so richly laden. A mother! a wife! her heart was too full. Alas! what thrill of anguish is that which shoots through every nerve. A cloud has settled upon her sunny prospect, a shadow has fallen upon her bower of peace.

It was like the awakening of the criminal on the day of his execution. Sleep—his last earthly sleep—has refreshed his weary frame, he feels the rest of his pillow, the comfort even of his prison couch. He sees the sunshine on the wall, and the dawn of morning comes upon him, as it was wont in childhood, with a flood of joy. He hears the distant song, it may be of a captive bird, but nature is strong within him, and the note of gladness reaches to his soul. It is the flush of life, that warms him, as it thrills through every vein. It is the flush of life, with all its recollections of the past, its anticipations.—Oh! agony! he sees—he feels it all. The iron has entered into his soul—he is a doomed man—the hour of his execution is at hand.

Unequal in her present state to any violent conflict of feeling, Eleanor Bond had sometimes closed her eyes, and buried her face in her pillow, wishing, that with that effort she could shut out one painful thought. As her



strength returned, however, and as she regained the power of attending to her children, so many sources of interest and pleasure opened again upon her, that she had less time to dwell upon that one root of bitterness, so well calculated to poison all.

During the dangerous period of her illness, her husband had never left her, except to attend to the claims of his professional duty, but now he was gone again to dine with Sir James Mornford, and Mrs. West, knowing she would be left alone, had brought her work, intending, in pure kindness, to spend the evening with her.

Eleanor would have received this visit with the most cordial welcome, for, in spite of her prejudices Mrs. West had insensibly stolen upon her affections, but, knowing what she had to anticipate, she felt distressed that eyes so pure should witness the spectacle of her husband's return. Her hope was, however, that the good lady would be gone before that time, and in this confidence she gave herself up to the pleasure she had lately experienced in her society.

Perhaps there mingled with this pleasure a little pique, a little disappointment that she was the only one amongst her many friends who had shown her any real kindness. Lady Mornford had a horror of all fevers, especially of delirium, which kept her entirely away from the house; Miss Masterman wrote often to offer her services, but specified so many days on which she would unavoidably be engaged, that it would have been difficult to find one on which she was likely to be at liberty. Mrs. Stanley had hurried backwards and forwards with a new prescription or receipt each time; while her daughters had made periodical visits, on which occasions they never failed to offer to come again, or to sit up all night, if Mrs. West

felt overdone. Yet, somehow or other, all were satisfied to go away after discharging these acts of duty, and Mrs. West was equally satisfied to remain, so that, had any one been more persevering in their attentions, they would only have interrupted the order and quiet which were so happily maintained.

The first stage of recovery from illness is seldom a season of enjoyment. The mind partakes of the weakness of the body, and, like an untuned instrument, is incapable of any lasting or perfect harmony. It is keenly alive to pleasurable sensations, but they are of a nature so mixed and transient, that involuntary tears are often the only answer we can make, to the united claims of nature and of conscience, calling upon us to rejoice with gratitude and hope.

Eleanor Bond felt all this in its fullest sense. She was but too happy to return to the duties and the pleasures of her little domestic sphere. She was happy to regain her health, her faculties, and all the good gifts with which by nature she had been endowed. She was happy to feel herself beneath a sheltering roof—beside a social hearth—surrounded by comforts, and warmed by the glow and animated by the activity of a new life; instead of being the silent and senseless inhabitant of a solitary grave—closed in—shut down—and beginning to be forgotten. What a contrast these thoughts presented—between what she was, and what she might have been!

Mrs. West was not insensible to the state of Eleanor's feelings; but while she longed for some opportunity of turning these feelings to account, she had too much delicacy to offer her advice, without first perceiving; that way was made for its welcome reception. At last, the conversation happening to turn upon the situation of a poor

woman who had recently died of a malady like that from which Eleanor was recovering; she observed with diffidence, that it was a question of great importance, to ask ourselves on such occasions—"For what purpose am I left, when others are called away?"

It was the very question with which Eleanor had been haunted night and day ever since the recovery of her reason. The mention of a subject so intimately connected with her secret meditations, at once drew forth her confidence; and the two friends, so recently bound together, entered upon a long and earnest conversation on the nature of christian duty, which had lost none of its interest, when Eleanor suddenly recollected the hour had arrived when it was just possible her husband might return.

The thought came upon her like a thunder-shock. How could she prevail upon this good woman to leave her alone, when she had come for the express purpose of cheering her solitude? Yet stay she must not; and therefore Eleanor began to request that Mrs. West would not remain longer than was agreeable on her account, for, happy as she was to have her company, she felt that she must be anxiously expected at home. Mrs. West, however, would listen to no reason for leaving her alone; and her dilemma grew every moment more distressing. She rose from her seat, looked at the time-piece, and again sat down, without being able to rest in any position, or to carry on any connected conversation. All her senses seemed to be turned into that of hearing, and every sound she heard seemed to be a staggering step advancing to the door, or the roll of Sir James Mornford's carriage bringing home her husband. At last Mrs. West began to fold up her work, for the truth had just flashed across her mind; and, taking a

hurried leave of Eleanor, she went quietly home without having betrayed the least suspicion of the real state of affairs in the family she was leaving.

Released from a load so oppressive, Eleanor now felt as if she could bear any thing, provided she might only bear it alone. As her custom had always been on such occasions, she sent all the servants to rest, fastened the street door herself, and then, drawing her chair before the fire, placed her feet upon the fender, and sat watching the glowing embers, until her eyes were glazed with tears.

It was the first time she had been up at a late hour since her illness. She could ill bear the fatigue; but there was to her no alternative, and one weary hour after another passed over, and still he did not come.

At last she heard steps approaching from the distance. They were strange and irregular, yet when they stopped at her door, there were sounds of suppressed laughter, and therefore it might seem that she had nothing to fear. Hastening down into the hall as quickly as her feeble strength enabled her, she succeeded, after many efforts, in drawing back the massive bolt of the door. Her face was pale as death, and either the night air, or something in her own feelings, made her shudder as she looked out in the hope of recognizing her husband amongst the strange men who stood upon the steps, and whom, but for the laughter and leering smiles with which they answered her inquiries, she might have mistaken for a band of midnight robbers, so wild and disorderly was their appearance. Yet they were some of what were called the first gentlemen of the town. They had all been dining at Sir James Mornford's, and they seemed to be highly enjoying the frolic, when two of them stepped forward, dragging the senseless form of Frederick Bond between them.

Intending to convey him to his own chamber, they had already ascended the first stairs, when Eleanor, in a firm and decided tone, requested them to stop, and to give themselves no more trouble on her account, or her husband's.

"But you seem to be alone," said the most reasonable of the party. "Where is Saunders?"

"I need no assistance," replied Eleanor, still more firmly. "Good-night, sir." And she closed the door after them, and bolted it again, with a strength that seemed almost supernatural.

Eleanor had now a difficult task to perform. Her husband was worse than helpless, for every time she succeeded in assisting him to rise from the stairs, he reeled round in a manner which threatened to precipitate both to the bottom. He was not, however, so insensible to his real situation as he appeared to be. Amidst the noise and the uproar of the jovial party, he had been the most boisterous, and the most absurd. But the scene was now changed; and the first sight of his wife, ghastly and wretched as she looked, brought with it a sudden conviction that he ought to make some effort to be serious too. He was perfectly sensible that he ought to go up to his chamber, and endeavour to be quiet, but still the walls and the stairs were reeling around him, the floor on which he trod was like a heaving sea, and when he lifted up one foot, it either remained suspended in the air, or was thrust forward with a violence intended to reach some distant object.

After long and patient effort, Eleanor at last succeeded in steadying him to the door of his chamber, where the servants, unbidden by her, had made every preparation for the state in which it was now always taken for granted

he would return. With difficulty she placed him on his bed. She then adjusted his distorted limbs, and smoothed his pillow, and bathed his burning brow, as gently and as tenderly as if he had been a slumbering cherub. But her effort had been too much for her, and, sinking down on her knees beside the bed, she burst into such an agony of tears, as prayer, and prayer alone, would have had the power to soothe.

In the morning, when Frederick Bond awoke, the first object which attracted his attention, was, the figure of his wife, seated in her nursing-chair, wrapped in a careless deshabille, and hushing her baby on her bosom. Her hair was uncurled, her eyes looked sunken and heavy, and her cheek was so deadly pale, that he could not help contrasting her present appearance with what it was a year, or rather two years ago. Still gazing, without venturing to interrupt the monotonous motion with which she was lulling her infant to sleep, he thought she grew paler and paler; and starting from his pillow, had but just time to save the child that was beginning to slip from her hold, when she fell back in her chair in a swoon.

Frederick Bond was one of those, who, when their fit of intoxication is over, can recollect much of what has passed. He even knew at the time, what he was saying or doing, though he appeared to have no power to control his words or actions. Thus when he beheld his wife, pale, suffering, and exhausted, all the transactions of the past night rushed upon his memory; and he felt, that, instead of cherishing the young and lovely being he had taken from the shelter of her father's roof—instead of guarding her from every danger, and averting every cause that could lead to a recurrence of her malady, he had in reality been inflicting upon her the greatest cruelty, and

hazarding that precious life, which he now felt as if he could die to preserve. Conscience-struck, appalled, and guilty, Frederick bent over the senseless form of his wife; and on the first signs of returning consciousness, he knelt before her, clasping her cold hands in his, looking up into her face, and imploring her to hear him, while he pronounced the solemn vow, and called heaven to be his witness, that from that time forth he would never inflict upon her the same cause of suffering again.

"Hear me, Eleanor," he exclaimed, with passionate fervour—"if you cannot speak, at least give me some token that you hear me."

Poor Eleanor, she was indeed beyond the power of speech, but she threw her arms around his neck, and held him to her heart, as if he should never be separated from that stronghold again.

"And you believe—you trust implicitly to my vow," he continued.

"As I believe in heaven—as I trust in the promises of the Bible," was uttered in a faint but deliberate and decided voice.

All was now peace and sunshine in Eleanor's pleasant home. She felt no fear; she knew no danger: she was ignorant that the root of human guilt lay deeper than the human will; and that man is seldom able of himself, and by a single effort of his individual power, to say to the temptation which most easily besets him—"thus far shalt thou go, and no farther."

All was now peace and sunshine, and Eleanor's cheek began to bloom as it was wont. Health was once more circling through her veins, and hope was busy at her heart. It is true, she perceived not in her husband the

clear eye, and steady hand, he once possessed. It is true, he often appeared strange, and wandering, and scarcely like himself; but he had given her his word, and that was a pledge too sacred to admit for a moment of the shadow of a doubt.

Restored to health and happiness, and feeling no apprehension of any change, Eleanor Bond fell easily back into the same train of habitual conduct to which she had been accustomed before her illness. The same subjects interested her mind, the same pleasures attracted her regard, and she herself became in all respects the same. The same? Impossible! For she had passed beneath the shadow of the gates of death, she had stood upon the confines of eternity, she had felt by what a frail tenure her life was held. The hand of affliction had been heavy upon her. She could not be the same; for these awful warnings demanded some answer—some token of having been heard and understood; and if passed by without attention, they would still be ready to make the same demand, at a time when it could only be answered by the final sentence of eternal condemnation.

In outward appearances, however, Eleanor was the same; and as the strongest proof that she had not really profited by the discipline she had undergone, her prejudices against Mrs. West began to return; and while she still spoke of her in terms of gratitude and affection, she was sensible of a certain shrinking from her presence, accompanied by a secret desire, whenever she heard her step approaching, that for the present she would go away until a more "convenient season." It seemed to her, in short, that Mrs. West was always calling at the wrong time; especially one day when she was just going up to dress for a dinner party at Sir James Mornford's, on



which occasion she could not altogether conceal her vexation and chagrin. Her visitor appeared, that day unusually grave and dull; and after trying some of the most common-place topics, she determined to make a desperate effort to escape, by pleading an engagement that must be attended to.

The fair face of Mrs. West was immediately overspread with the deepest crimson, and she was evidently much agitated; but still keeping her seat, she answered mildly—"I know your time is precious, nor is it of less value to me; for if you will give me leave, I will speak to you on a subject of great importance, before you go to Sir James Mornford's."

With a foreboding of something extremely vexatious and unpleasant, Eleanor again seated herself, and Mrs. West went on.

"There is a subject on which I have long wished to speak to you; for I feel that I have no right to the pleasure of your society, unless I will deal faithfully with you as a friend. I have prayed God to give me power to speak as I ought, but hitherto my weakness has prevailed against my sense of duty."

"I believe," said Eleanor, in a tone by no means the most conciliating, "that I can anticipate your meaning. And if the duty you have imposed upon yourself be an irksome one, I can spare you the pain of proceeding farther."

"I do not understand you," said Mrs. West. "And as the duty to which I allude is certainly not self-imposed, I must persevere in acting upon it, if the result should be altogether unsatisfactory. I must speak to you about your husband."

Eleanor coloured deeply; and while a feeling but little

allied to christian meekness took possession of her whole frame, she endeavoured to devise some plan by which she might repel, what appeared to her, in the character of an unwarrantable interference.

"Eleanor," said Mrs. West, "I have not known you long. I have loved you for a still shorter time. The bond between us may be easily broken, for I am not difficult to repel. But the case is very different with your husband. He was placed under my care as an orphan boy. In my heart and my home he was unto me even as my own child. A mother's eye is quick-sighted to that which may endanger the happiness of her offspring; and I have seen—Mr. West and I have both observed—"

"Say no more," interrupted Eleanor. "There is no need for this. I would rather give everything I possess, than have such a subject named; but since you have forced it upon me, I must inform you, that all danger is now over."

"How?"

"My husband has made me a solemn promise, that he will never give me the same cause of uneasiness again."

"Is that all?"

"Surely it is enough. No one has ever yet had occasion to doubt his word."

"So far as the promise extends, it is well; because I am sure his intention is good. I have no doubt of his sincerity, but I do doubt his power to keep the resolution he has made."

"You surely forget how injurious and unjust is this suspicion. Nothing but ignorance of his danger could so long have prevented his making this determination before. His eyes are now opened, and it must be the

easiest thing in the world, to refrain from what is in itself so repulsive and degrading."

"My dear young friend, you speak like one who has made few observations, and had but little experience. All vice is repulsive and degrading, yet, how few are induced to shun it from this cause. It is not with any sinful habit, as with an unsightly garment, that we can always cast it off by a mere effort of the will. Vice is rather a disease which affects the whole system, and which, though discovered by its interruption of one particular function, can only be effectually subdued by a renovation of the whole. My object, however, is not to speak of your husband as a free agent, or otherwise. My duty is with you, as his wife. You have rendered that duty doubly painful by the spirit in which you have this day received me; but I must go on, for the occasion is too urgent to admit of delay. I have often feared—can you tell me my fears are unfounded—that a false and unpardonable delicacy was preventing your being that help to your husband which you ought to be in this crisis of his fate. I speak strongly, because I do consider that a crisis has arrived, when he must either impose some violent restraint upon his habits and inclinations, or be irretrievably lost."

Eleanor felt her situation every moment more uneasy—more intolerable. At last she interrupted Mrs. West. "I believe your intentions are good. But, as I told you before, this interference is altogether useless, my husband has given me his word."

"That is all well, but what part have you taken in helping him to keep it?"

"He needs no help of mine. His own resolution is surely sufficient."

"My poor young friend, let me entreat you not to make

so fatal a mistake. As you value his interest here and hereafter, let me entreat you to put away this false delicacy, and to speak home to his conscience. Let me entreat you to deal with him as one whose immortal soul is committed to your care. If you saw that his bodily health was suffering under a dangerous malady, how would you endeavour to convince him of his real situation! How would you plead with him in favour of the remedies prescribed! how would you sacrifice your peace, your comfort, nay, even your hold on his affections, if that were needful, to save him from his threatened fate. And is the case less urgent now? Can you, who profess to love him so tenderly, be satisfied to stand still, and see him sinking lower and lower, losing first one hold and then another, until all is lost."

"Let me implore you," exclaimed Eleanor, "to forbear. It is not—it cannot come to this."

"It has come to this in a thousand cases, that were once as hopeful as your own; and if you do not rouse yourself from this false security, it must come to this in yours. Already there are whisperings to his disadvantage. His character is beginning to suffer. But that is nothing in comparison with his situation in the sight of God. My husband has lately hinted to me the probability of dissolving his connexion with him, unless his habits should be improved. But this is also nothing."

Mrs. West had proceeded thus far, when she saw that Eleanor was beginning to tremble violently; and finding that she had succeeded in her chief object, by rousing her to a full sense of the seriousness and importance of her situation, she spoke less strongly, though she still went on to urge upon her the necessity of commencing her new duties, by warning her husband, from that very day. "And

first," said she, laying her hand upon Eleanor's arm, and speaking in the tenderest tone of maternal solicitude—"first retire to your chamber, and ask a blessing on the step you are about to take. For without God's blessing you can hope for nothing. Do this, dear Eleanor, and you have everything to hope. Do this, I entreat you, for he is worth saving."

Eleanor felt her heart softened by this cordial acknowledgment of her husband's worth, and she hastened to her chamber with a sort of vague intention of putting the advice of Mrs. West in practice. Here, however, she met her husband, all bustle, impatience, and wonder at her long delay. Her maid had spread forth her new dress on the sofa, and she readily excused herself by thinking, that no time was left for the execution of her purpose.

"It is better not to pray at all," she said to herself, "than to do it in a hurried and irreverent manner, and, as for speaking to my husband now, nothing could be more inappropriate. Every thing we know may be lost, by the opportunity not being suited to the act."

By this mode of reasoning, Eleanor succeeded in quieting her conscience for the time; and she was soon elegantly dressed, and seated in Lady Mornford's drawing-room.

It struck her that day, as it might have done some months before, that Lady Mornford was not in her accustomed health and spirits. Her eyes were still bright, and there glowed a spot of crimson on each cheek; but it was not the glow of health, and her figure was evidently much fallen away. Her manner was more gentle, too, as if subdued by some secret cause of trial, while the absent fits into which she often fell, betrayed a wandering of the mind, to which she had hitherto been a stranger.

At the dinner table, however, she roused herself; and though she ate but little, she swallowed, apparently unharmed, a quantity of wine that would have startled the abstinents of the present day.

On retiring to the drawing-room, Lady Mornford entered upon a long list of apologies for not visiting her friend more frequently during her illness; and though she wept profusely to hear how severe that illness had been, she laughed the next moment, at the idea of Mrs. West officiating as her chief nurse.

"Poor Eleanor!" said she, "I have pitied you a thousand times, to hear what hands you had fallen into; they must have had a design against your life, when they sent for that woman."

And Eleanor joined in the laugh. She had not the generosity, or rather the justice, to say what Mrs. West had really been to her in her illness. Indeed, she seemed as if the good feelings she had once possessed were all escaping from her, so much had her heart been hardened by the season she had lately passed through, of warnings neglected, and duties unfulfilled.

The visitors who dined that day at Sir James Mornford's were but a small proportion of the evening party. At a later hour the drawing-room was thronged with guests, and music was just begun, when Eleanor, who turned over the leaves for a juvenile performer, overheard the following conversation between Miss Masterman and the mistress of the house.

"Mr. Bond of course dines here to-day," said the former, holding up a piece of music before her face. "I always like to learn where he has dined, that I may tell the ladies to beware. Do you know, it is said he is actually losing his excellent practice."

“Oh, don't believe it!” replied Lady Mornford, “nothing of the kind, I assure you.”

“But the Medways, you know, have entirely given him up; and Lady Craven intends to do the same.”

“The more foolish they,” observed the lady of the house, “the more blind to their own interest. For my part, I would rather employ Mr. Bond in a case of difficulty, than any of the boasted operators of the metropolis. No one can be more attentive, and his skill is beyond all question.”

“Yes, if one could be sure he would bring his skill along with him. But the misfortune is, he sometimes comes without it.” And the speaker laughed as if she had said a clever and pointed thing.

Eleanor felt her cheek glow with indignation at the commencement of these remarks; but her heart as instantaneously sunk within her, under a secret sense that they were but too true. With painful and determined effort she afterwards roused herself, to make the usual attempts at common-place conversation; when the whole aspect of the world seemed changed to her, by seeing her husband enter the drawing-room in the full possession of his reason; and while he passed from one group of ladies to another, paying the usual compliments, or making the usual observations which the occasion called forth, she followed him with an intense and enraptured gaze, as if she was contemplating the most beautiful object upon earth, for the first time in her life.”

“Your husband is unquestionably a handsome man,” said Lady Mornford laughing. “But this is no time or place for acting Damon and Delia, so please to take your seat at one of the card-tables, or assist me, if you prefer it, in seeing that every one is satisfactorily arranged. Direct

your charitable attentions to that part of the room where the good people are all sitting as quiet as Egyptian mummies. Beguile Madame Bertine, that endless talker, into a seat beside the deaf old gentleman; and take care that Miss Masterman has somebody to flirt with. As you love me, make as much noise as you can. Draw out all the politicians, and let them be well pitted against one another. Tell some queer stories to those young girls, and if any one in the room attempts a witticism, you must laugh immoderately. By the way, you know the little old maid who lives at No. 3. Everybody knows her. She wears green spectacles, and runs about with tracts. Well, she was actually taken up by that tremendous gale yesterday, carried round the corner of the street, and hurled into a shop, where the master, believing her to be intoxicated, committed her to the care of the police, green spectacles and all. Now, tell this with all the spirit you can—mimic her well—and be sure you don't leave out the tracts, or the story will lose half its relish with some of your audience."

Eleanor went to her post, as she was desired, but of all the stories in the world, she was least likely to tell one about intoxication. The party, however, were so well provided, each with their own contributions from the stores of the preceding day, that Lady Mornford, finding the desire of her heart accomplished, by every one being engaged with their own or another's story, gently touching the arm of Frederick Bond, requested him to turn over with her a portfolio of engravings which had been sent for her inspection.

With every appearance of earnestness, she descanted on their various merits; and then, while her eyes were still fixed upon the same objects, and her voice maintained



the same tone, she went on to say, "I hate all formal appointments; they frighten me to death. But I want to tell you, Mr. Bond, that I have formed a desperate resolution, and I depend on you for helping me to keep it."

"You know how entirely I am your devoted servant," said Frederick, with unusual complaisance, for he was just sufficiently elated to be charmed with himself, and with every one else.

"Hush! hush!" said Lady Mornford. "That is not the style of conversation I am desiring just now. You must answer me quickly, and to the purpose, for this tale of the winds and the waves will not last for ever, and before it ceases, our tête-a-tête must come to an end."

"Go on," said Frederick, somewhat sobered by the unusual gravity of her manner.

"Well then," (and Lady Mornford gasped as if her last breath had been escaping from her bosom;) I have decided upon what you recommended a year ago. I cannot bear this torture without making Sir James as wretched as myself. I am determined at last to have an operation."

Frederick started, "He had strongly recommended an operation a year ago, but the case might now be materially altered. He had, however, been wonderfully successful in all the operations he had undertaken, and if there was the slightest probability of a cure, he was not the man to flinch from his duty.

"But Sir James?" said he. "He was opposed to it before; what does he say now?"

"He is to know nothing of it until all is over."

Frederick shook his head.

"Ah, you may look as threatening as you please, but tell me one thing—Have I not a right over my own life?"

“As far as you can command it, you certainly have.”

“Why remind me of that? I mean, of course, as far as I can command it. Now, hear my plan:—Sir James goes into Scotland to shoot, on the first day of the season; I shall have a new governess, who will know nothing, except that I am taken ill, and you and Mr. West will manage all the rest.”

“Pardon me, my dear lady: Mr. West is a timid man. He will never be brought over to assist me, without the knowledge and consent of Sir James.”

“Nonsense—perfect nonsense! Can you not make him understand the generous feeling of desiring to spare my poor husband all the suffering he would endure to see me suffer; and the delight, the immeasurable delight, of receiving him home when all is over.”

“But suppose—only for the sake of viewing the subject in every light—suppose—”

“You don’t mean to say there is the slightest shadow of danger?”

Frederick saw that she was watching his face with an expression of almost frantic anxiety, and, unable to answer her appeal as he felt that he ought—unable in short to discuss the subject in any satisfactory manner, under such peculiar circumstances, he requested permission of Lady Mornford to call on her the following day.

“Not for worlds,” she answered; “not for worlds, until Sir James has left home. I think he had some time ago a lurking suspicion of my purpose, and if he had the least idea that I was plotting with you, nothing could induce him to leave me. This is the reason why I have chosen so strange a situation for such a subject. But see, we are observed; and now what do you think of this moonlight scene? Our artists always make the moon herself, and

the earth, and the water beneath, look exactly as they ought; but they ruin the whole by rendering the clouds the most conspicuous part of the picture.

“Ah, Sir James! are you, too, there? I am but too happy you are come to suffer under my triumph. Mr. Bond advises me to purchase this—and this; and he says that favourite of yours is a perfect horror.”

By this time the company had gathered round the table, and Lady Mornford spread the engravings before them, with a sort of dashing remark upon each, when, finding the party sufficiently interested, she drew back unobserved. The circle closing after her, she escaped into another apartment, where refreshments were already prepared, and after swallowing an unusual quantity of wine, into which she poured a powerful opiate, she was soon enabled to return to her guests, with an appearance of composure by which they were easily deceived.

Shocked and perplexed by what he had just witnessed, Frederick Bond felt no relish for the mirth or the chit-chat of the evening; and on withdrawing to a remote corner of the room, he found there a little coterie of gentlemen, all as weary as himself.

With mutual consent they left the drawing-room, for there were other apartments thrown open to the guests that night, and happening by chance or by choice to return to the apartment where they had dined, they soon found a use for the glasses which still remained upon the table.

In the mean time Eleanor Bond was one of the most animated and the most happy of the party who remained. Exulting in her triumph over Miss Masterman, she seated herself beside her with great complacency, and even went so far as to request she would allow the carriage ordered

for them, to conduct her home, as her residence was a little beyond their own.

Whether this proposal was made in pure kindness, or with a desire of proving to the greatest gossip in the town, that her husband could return from a dinner party, even to his own door, a sober man, it is not our business to inquire. Suffice it that the offer was readily accepted, and Eleanor watched with impatience for her husband's reappearance, in order that she might inform him of the arrangement she had made.

"Where is your master?" said she to Saunders, who assisted in attending on the company.

"In the dining-room, ma'am, with Sir James and three other gentlemen."

"In the dining-room?" said Miss Masterman, repeating his words with a peculiar emphasis; and Eleanor would certainly have had some misgiving in the secret of her heart, but for the confidence she still continued to repose in her husband's word. It was a confidence which had never yet been shaken; and though the hour grew late, and many of the guests were gone, she still believed his promise would be kept unbroken.

Miss Masterman was now becoming anxious to leave the house, but having sent away her own servant, she had no alternative but that of waiting until Mr. Bond should be pleased to appear.

"Go and tell your master that we wait for him," said Eleanor to Saunders, as soon as she could speak to him without being overheard.

The servant went as he was ordered, and a scuffling sound was soon after heard on the stairs. At last the door of the drawing-room was thrown wide open, and Frederick Bond appeared. He did not, however, advance

many steps towards the company, but stood bolt-upright, looking from side to side with a vacant leer, and nodding his head with such an idiotic expression of countenance, that the gentlemen found it impossible to conceal their laughter, and even the ladies joined in a sort of suppressed titter, interrupted only by occasional exclamations of "odious," "monstrous," and "absurd;" with entreaties that he might not be permitted to come nearer.

Alas for poor Eleanor! She had so loved the world, and courted its approbation for the sake of its friendship, its courtesy, and its gentle dealing towards her and hers, that a bitter sense of its fickleness and its ungenerous treatment, now mingled with other feelings of disappointment and wounded pride. Every thing seemed to be against her on that miserable night. Not only was Miss Masterman her companion in the carriage, and witness to all the absurdities of her husband; but Mr. Stanley impatiently awaited their arrival at home, having called many times during the evening to consult his son-in-law on some important business. Every thing seemed to be against her that night, and she threw herself upon her couch in a state of utter wretchedness and despair.

Not long after this evening, Sir James Mornford left home, as had been expected, to enjoy his favourite amusement of grouse-shooting in the north of England; and on the very day of his departure, Lady Mornford had a long interview with Mr. Bond and his partner. As Frederick had predicted, Mr. West declined taking any part in her scheme, without the consent of Sir James; he even went so far as to speak of danger, though neither of the doctors thought of dissuading her entirely from the operation. So far from that, Mr. Bond was rather anxious it should be performed, partly from personal regard, for

he knew that she must otherwise fall a victim to her malady; and partly from the confidence he felt in his own skill, and the hope he entertained that a successful operation would be the means of restoring in some measure the reputation he was so much in danger of losing. He knew also, much better than Mr. West, the peculiar temperament of Sir James Mornford; and he could enter into the feelings of his wife, in her generous, but ill-judged design of sparing him the anxiety and distress, he might otherwise be under the necessity of enduring.

Not all his arguments, however, were sufficient to induce Mr. West to consent. He could not be made to understand that the life of a married woman, and a mother, was exclusively her own property; and when pressed almost beyond his power of resistance, he at last formed the design of writing to Sir James himself, and ascertaining whether it was really true, as Lady Mornford so often told him, that Sir James was quite willing the operation should be performed, provided he was not at home, nor aware of the time of its taking place.

It was perhaps well for Lady Mornford's patience and forbearance, that she knew nothing, at the time, of this well-meant interference; which, though conducted with the greatest prudence and caution, entirely failed in the effect it was intended to produce. The letter remained at the post-office of a little country village, to which it was directed, while Sir James extended his excursions, day after day, further up into a wild and thinly peopled district, intent only upon the amusement of the moment, and little dreaming of the events which were transpiring at home.

In the mean time, Lady Mornford had laid her own schemes; and sending for her doctors one morning, she received them with an open letter in her hand, and, with

an appearance of the greatest gravity, began to inform them that her fate was decided, for she had that morning received from her husband his most full and entire permission to proceed according to the direction of her own judgment, and the advice of her medical friends.

Perceiving that Mr. West was still incredulous, she opened the letter, and read aloud in a clear unflinching voice, what appeared to be a confirmation of all the facts she had stated.

Mr. West could doubt no longer ; but still remembering his own letter, he begged permission to wait a sufficient length of time for it to have been received and answered. This time expired, and again he was obliged to appear before Lady Mornford. She had received a second letter from her husband, confirming the last, and was proceeding to read it aloud, when Mr. West, forgetting the intended secrecy of his own share in these transactions, asked, with great simplicity and earnestness, whether Sir James acknowledged the receipt of his letter of the seventh.

Lady Mornford started, and for a moment her self-possession forsook her. But she had tact enough to recover her lost ground, and, shaking her head at Mr. West, she added with a smile, "Yes, indeed, he does acknowledge this act of treachery, for which I can hardly forgive you. He begs me also to express to you his gratitude, and to assure you with what confidence he commits me to your skill and care. He even goes so far as to say, that he shall not think of returning home until he hears further intelligence, and begs Mr. Bond will not lose a moment in letting him know when all is over."

Lady Mornford was so prompt and well-practised a deceiver, that the single-heartedness of Mr. West was

entirely imposed upon ; and though Frederick Bond, who knew her better, entertained some lurking suspicions of her sincerity, he kept his own counsel, while both prepared to discharge their duty in the ablest and most effectual manner.

It was a matter of astonishment with the doctors, how a woman; on some occasions so weak, and always so volatile as Lady Mornford, could acquit herself under such circumstances with so much calmness and decision. But they had no opportunity of watching her through the day, and they consequently saw not those violent hysterical attacks to which she had lately become increasingly subject, and which, she believed, and taught all around her to believe, nothing but stimulants would subdue. Thus her habits were gradually assuming a character the most injurious to her constitution under present circumstances ; but while the doctors were sometimes startled by the feverish state of her pulse, they were inclined to attribute it almost entirely to the excitable state of her feelings, and believed that her whole frame would be restored to a more quiet and healthy tone, so soon as her mind should be relieved from the burden of her distressing malady.

Thus all parties went on with their preparations. Lady Mornford spent much of her time in writing, though she generally concluded her task by tearing what she had written, and committing it to the fire. Perhaps the hardest duty she had to perform, was that of taking leave of her children, who were to be sent with their governess to spend some weeks at a neighbouring watering-place. Still, hard as this duty was, it must be gone through; and now the morning of their departure had arrived, and the carriage was at the door, and yet their arms were around



her neck, and she could not bring herself to kiss them for the last time.

Lady Mornford had always been more like a sister than a mother to her children. Juvenile in her habits, and easily diverted by the frolic of the moment, she had joined with avidity in all their sports; and though she had lately, with a kind of fretfulness entirely foreign to her nature, sometimes driven them from her side, it had only been to receive them in her altered moods, with more affection, and to win them back to love her better than before.

It is said that all have their idols, that every individual of the human race, has some object of attachment, for which they thirst, and strive, more than for any other. With Lady Mornford this object was simply to be loved—to be loved for the sake of the comfort and support which the affection of those around her afforded. This object she pursued with so much eagerness, that rather than even suffer a momentary alienation from the hearts of her children, she risked their temporal and eternal happiness by indulging every wish, and studying to bestow upon them every day some new gratification more welcome than the last.

How far this system was calculated to defeat its own end, it is unnecessary here to state. One of its results alone will suffice; for while Lady Mornford's children regarded their mother as the source and fountain of all their enjoyments, they were prepared to cast off both their love and their allegiance, at any moment, when those enjoyments should cease.

“And now,” said Lady Mornford to her oldest daughter, a beautiful girl of fifteen, “you are going to the pleasant sea-shore, to wander on the beach, and enjoy

the bright sunsets that you love so much. For your father's sake I entreat you not to forget your drawing. Here is the sketch-book I have long wished to give you. Be sure that you fill every page with drawings, to gladden his heart when he returns."

"For you, Caroline, I have provided a piano. Here is the music you want. Let nothing interfere with your lessons, or your practice. It is possible your father may want you to play to him more than he has ever done before."

"How so?"

"Never mind, attend to your music, and make him happy in any way you can."

"And you, George, what am I to say to such a rebel as you?"

"I don't care much what you say; I only wish you were going with us, that I might drive you on the sands, and have somebody to take my part when July and Carry are both against me. If you are ill, the sea air will do you far more good than staying here alone. Don't you think so, mamma?"

All this while, little Harry the youngest child, was hanging with his arms around his mother's neck, one moment smothering her with kisses, and the next whispering in her ear the most threatening denunciations, if she would not accompany them to the sea-shore.

"I hate the new governess," he said; "and I will hate you too, if you will not go."

"Then let me breathe at least, Harry, while I tell you of all the pleasant things you will see."

"I don't care for any of them. I tell you again, I won't go, unless you do; for we never have any fun without you."

In this manner they pleaded with their mother; some of them on her knee, and others hanging round her neck, until her fortitude began to fail, and the warm tears gushed from her eyes; for on this morning, more than any other, she had felt a strange awe come over her, as if her life was indeed suspended by a thread; and it struck her but too forcibly, that perhaps she might never see her children, nor feel the warmth of their affectionate caresses, again.

"See! see!" said the child, as he pointed to her tears, "I am sure she is relenting. Come with us, dear Mamma, and we shall all be so happy."

"You will be happy with Miss Lewis, I am sure."

"Happy with Miss Lewis!" exclaimed all in one voice of unanimous contempt; while Harry whispered again in his mother's ear, "She looks so savage, I believe she means to drown us all in the sea; and if she does, what will become of you, without me."

"That is a puzzling question, Harry; but what would you do without me?"

"Oh! I should soon die, that is quite certain; for there would be nobody left to be kind to us then."

"Not your Papa?"

"Papa is only kind sometimes. There is nobody kind always, except you."

"Not Susan, your faithful nurse?"

"Oh, Susan, and Jane, and Mary, are all kind when you are in the nursery. It is then we are 'sweet little dears,' and 'angels,' and 'beauties,' and 'loves.' But the moment you are gone, we are a 'pack of little ugly monkeys,' and 'the most disagreeable children in the world.'"

And are you indeed so desolate, thought Lady Mornford, that you have no creature in the world to love you, except me?

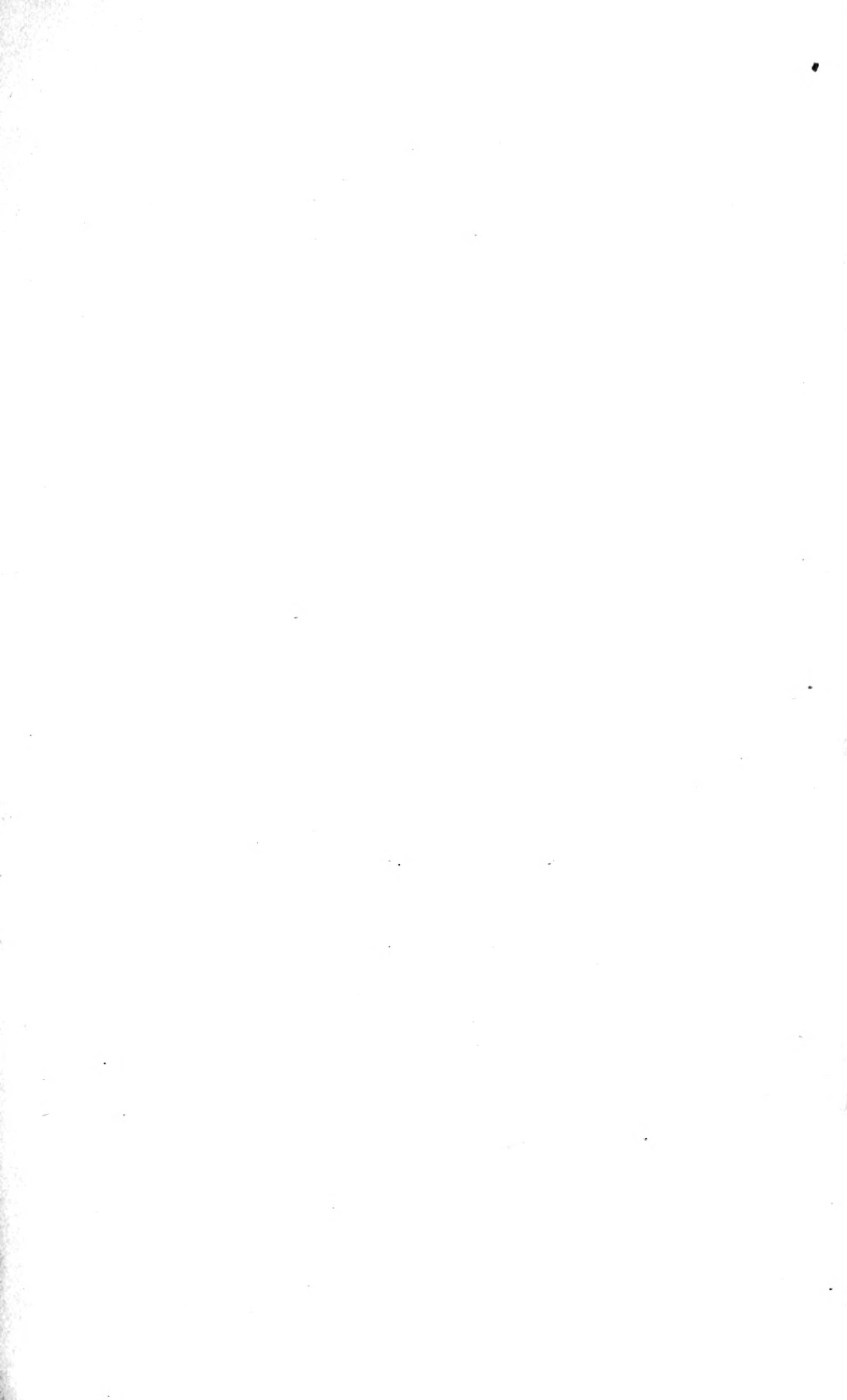
“Well,” said she, rousing herself from the reverie these reflections were well calculated to produce, and at the same time shaking off the embraces of her children, “We shall soon meet again. I shall then be in better health, and we shall altogether be happier than we have been for a long time. Adieu—adieu—the coach is at the door.”

She then kissed them all once more, and, rushing into her own room, drew the bolt after her, and buried her head in her shawl, that she might not hear the murmuring of some, and the resistance of others, as the little party were forced into the carriage which waited to convey them away.

And this was all—all that a tender mother had to charge upon the hearts and the consciences of her children, for time, and for eternity.

“I have yet another duty,” said Lady Mornford, ringing the bell, and ordering the servant to request Mr. Bond to come up stairs—“I have another duty, and then all will be finished.”

“Mr. Bond,” said she, holding out her hand as he entered the room, and speaking in a tone more than usually affectionate—“you are the only man amongst all my husband’s associates, for whom he cares one straw. You in your turn understand Sir James—his character and disposition; both are peculiar. I am not going to talk to you about the state of my soul, as the Methodists say, or any of those things which Sir James tells me ought to be left to parsons and old women; but I do want to say a word about my poor children. If—if,”—and her lips, which already had assumed the paleness of ashes, quivered as she spoke—“If I should die, Sir James would never take any more thought about them. He would dread to behold anything that could remind him





of me ; for, worthless as I am, he loves me beyond all reason ; and the fact of his heart being so shut against all the world, only makes him love me the more. Now, what I want to say is this—Will you—will your wife give some little care, just to see that the servants don't abuse them—that is all. And, now, are you ready ?”

## CHAP. III.

## DANGERS OF DINING OUT.

It was late one winter's evening, when Frederick Bond, after filling his glass for the third time, leaned his arms upon the table, and looked earnestly at his wife, as if anxious to be invited to speak. It was not a scene of convivial enjoyment, as the sparkle of his eye might seem to indicate, but a quiet fire-side scene ; yet how different from that, in the midst of which they used to spend their evenings, some five years ago. That figure, too, the pale thin female, so busily applying her needle, close to the one candle—can that be Eleanor Bond ? So haggard—so worn—as if ten years instead of five, with their accumulated cares, had passed over her. And he who looks so animated, and so anxious to talk, how many grades has he descended from the gentleman, since we beheld him last. We have often called him handsome, but how few traces of his beauty are discoverable now ! His dark hair has grown thin, and straight, and hangs in disordered locks from his partially bald head. His forehead, once so noble, is coarse, and heated, and swollen. His eyes are bloodshot, and the lower lids beginning to droop and inflame. But his mouth is more changed than all—wide—loose—and insatiable—it looks as if oceans would not quench its thirst. He has ceased now to put any restraint upon his appetite for stimulus. He fills his glass in the presence of his wife, and talks for hours about the same thing, with the garrulity of a child.



And Eleanor has kept her resolution. She has never spoken to him on the subject of that besetting sin, which has told upon her appearance, almost as much as his, though in a widely different manner.

"Come, put down that everlasting stitchery," said he to his wife; "and listen to me; for I am going to tell you a long story."

"I can listen better," said Eleanor meekly, "while I am at work.—So pray go on; and let me do the same."

"Put down your work, I say; and listen to me; and don't treat me like a fool either, as you very often do. I say, I will be listened to; and if you don't hear me out, you will repent of it as long as you live; for I must tell somebody. I must make a clean breast, as the dying people say. I don't care who I speak to, only you happen to be near, and therefore I will tell you."

Eleanor had put down her work as she was desired, for her curiosity had begun to be awakened; until, seeing her husband refill his glass, she felt assured that the whole was mere pastime—one of those aimless, senseless tricks, which, for want of amusement, he was accustomed to play upon her.

The fact, however, was, he had long been anxious to unburden his mind of a load, which in his sober moments, lay heavy upon it, and often induced him to deepen the draught, by which alone he hoped to drive it from his thoughts. He had tried repeatedly to speak to his wife on this subject; but the effort seemed to require so much stimulus to support it, that before reaching the necessary pitch of resolution, he had too frequently passed beyond the bounds of self-command, and thus his secret remained locked within his own bosom.

On this night he was precisely at that stage of intoxica-

tion, when conviction of culpability is distinctly felt; and yet felt so entirely without its proper accompaniments of shame and remorse, that the conscious transgressor will rather disclose than conceal his own errors. It is in this state that some men will even dilate upon their own propensity to intemperance; and while they hold the tempting glass in their hands, bewail the fatality by which they are kept in bondage.

“You remember,” said Frederick Bond to his wife, who was still making some effort to attend, “that unfortunate affair of Lady Mornford’s. It is a subject, you know, Eleanor, on which I never could be induced to speak; but it was not because I thought lightly of it. No, no,” and he fortified himself with another draught.

“Well, it was all a trick of hers about her husband’s consent—kindly meant, poor soul, for she was devotedly fond of Sir James, and this was not the only falsehood she ever told, to spare him pain. Indeed, she was one of those who believe that the sin of a falsehood consists in its tendency to do harm; and having once admitted that a falsehood is allowable if it can do good, there is no saying to what extent of evil these principles may be carried. Now my idea is, that every breach of the moral law, which has been laid down for us in the bible, is equally culpable; and that we have as little power to judge, as we have right to choose, which is the best, or the worst.—Don’t you think so, Eleanor?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, I am glad you agree with me on this important point—and now to my story. You know with what calmness Lady Mornford conducted herself until the last. I declare to you, there was something in this calmness so unnatural to her—so unlike the whole of her

previous character, that it overcame me more than the most violent exhibition of feeling.

"I had gone to bed, I need not tell you how, the night before. I was all unnerved in the morning. My hand trembled like an aspen leaf, and somehow or other it came into my head, that she would die—die unwarned; for though Mr. West had spoken to her very seriously, we neither of us apprehended any danger: nor indeed was there any, except from her previous habits, with which we were not then sufficiently acquainted.

"Well, as I told you, the thought came over me like a flood of dark waters; I could not drive it away; and sometimes I formed the design of questioning her again about the letters from Sir James, and asking her to let me read them myself. At last, however, I adopted another plan—I made some excuse about my instruments, and, returning home, I swallowed such a draught of brandy as would have dissipated heavier thoughts than mine. When I returned, I felt capable of anything; and had the operation been begun then, I doubt not I should have gone through with it well. Unfortunately, however, poor Lady Mornford had fallen into one of her hysteric fits; and by the time she was sufficiently recovered, the whole world was dancing round me. Life and death—all things welcome and horrible, became as one; and yet, with a kind of mechanical effort, I prepared to begin my painful duty.

"I remember little more, except one circumstance, and that has been enough. I remember Mr. West snatching from me the instrument which I held in my hand, and whispering something between his teeth about "butchery!" That evening, you know, I was sent for in great haste by Lady Mornford's maid, who knew the

friendship which existed between her mistress and us. Mr. West was still there, seated near the bed on which the sufferer lay. He took little notice of my entrance, but I soon saw what was the real state of the case. The utmost caution was required. It was necessary that the house should be kept as still as death. The knockers were muffled, the servants were forbidden to enter the room, and there we sat, without speaking to each other, until midnight. The patient was restless, still she uttered not a word, only a low moaning escaped her, which made the silence more dreadful; I would have given worlds for some sound, or some movement, to break that sepulchral calm; for I felt in my heart, that if Lady Mornford should die, it would be I who had murdered her.

“Ay, you may start; I believed it then: I believe it now. How could it be otherwise? The case was worse than we had anticipated. It required, however, nothing more than skill and care; I had neither; I could not even feel sure of the knife I held in my hand, for the tingling that ran through my whole frame down to the ends of my fingers.

“Well, I tell you, there we sat; and the clock had just struck one, when the rattle—I cannot call it—the roll of a carriage was heard in the distance. It came on like thunder, clash up to the steps of the door, and, almost before it stopped, there was a ring, and then a knock, enough to wake a city.

“Not a word was spoken still; but we looked at each other, Mr. West and I, for we both knew what to expect. A steady regular step was then heard ascending the stairs; the door of the room was thrown open, and Sir James Mornford walked straight up to the bed-side of his wife. She, poor creature, had neither regarded the knock nor

the ring, nor the roll of the carriage, for she scarcely seemed sensible of anything ; but the moment her husband spoke to her, she uttered such a terrible shriek, that it rung through all the house ; and from that moment she never spoke rationally again.

“ Mr. West and I were placed in the most embarrassing circumstances ; for Sir James took no notice of us whatever. He sent for a physician, and desired him to put to us all the necessary questions. Mr. West told a straightforward story, attributing the excited state of the patient, entirely to the shock her feelings had received on the unexpected return of her husband. But I knew better how to tell the truth ; and as the intoxication of the morning wore off, a horror seized upon me, such as no language can describe. I forced my services upon the poor sufferer, night and day, to the utmost stretch of human power ; but what a mockery was all this from me ! I watched the countenance of her husband, which never by any chance seemed to turn towards me—but what an insult was my sympathy, when the work of destruction was all mine !

“ With regard to the suddenness of his return, he told us nothing. We were left to imagine, what we afterwards learned to be the truth, that on returning from an excursion, which had been prolonged from day to day, and then from week to week, he had found waiting for him at the post-office, Mr. West’s letter. He hesitated not a moment, as to the most prudent mode of proceeding, but set off on the instant, and pursued his melancholy journey at the utmost speed, supported all the way by a faint hope, sometimes rising to conviction, that, although his wife might plan, and talk about her plans, even to Mr. West, she would not have the resolution to carry

them into effect, without some one to support her ; and with this hope at its height, he had laid his hand upon the muffled knocker, which told its own story.

“ Finding our attendance rather an annoyance than otherwise to Sir James, Mr. West and I both agreed to withdraw, requesting to be sent for when needed. On the night of Lady Mornford’s death, Mr. West was requested to attend, but no message came to me until the morning, when I received a formal announcement, that my services would not be required again, for that all was over.

“ I had believed for some days that she would die ; and yet the shock seemed to come unexpectedly at last, for I had not seen her. I had not pressed her hand, insensible though it might have been, to my lips—to my heart. I had not breathed beside her one prayer, and she had been incapable of praying for herself. How did I long to visit the still chamber, to gaze upon the lifeless countenance—to kneel beside the silent bier. This too was denied me, and justly—for was I not her murderer ?

“ That Mr. West would scrupulously keep my secret, I seldom entertained any lasting doubt.”

“ Perhaps you were altogether mistaken,” said Eleanor. “ You confess you were not exactly aware of all that passed. Is it not equally probable that this horrible idea should have been entirely misapprehension ?”

“ Convince me of this, Eleanor, and you may yet save me ; but no, it is impossible. As a proof that Mr. West was acquainted with the whole, he took that opportunity of dissolving our partnership, and placing his son in my position.”

“ This had been agreed upon, when you first joined him. It therefore proved nothing.”

"Do you mean to say, Eleanor," exclaimed the wretched man, who had now talked himself into the full possession of his senses, "that there is the least chance of my not being guilty of Lady Mornford's death?"

"I do."

He grasped her arm with a violence which seemed as if, by that hold, he was clinging to his last earthly hope, while he added, "This one idea has been my daily and hourly torment for the last five years. In the dead of the night, the figure of that gay thoughtless creature has stood beside me; and when the storm has howled, I have heard that horrible shriek with which she welcomed back her husband, as loud as the thunder, and as distinctly as on that awful night.

"I thought at first that every one must know it—that Sir James was acquainted with the whole—and that I should be arraigned before a public court, and tried for my life. Every step I heard behind me in the dark, sounded like the tread of an officer of justice; and every letter I opened seemed to threaten a criminal accusation. In the agony of my soul, I had recourse to prayer. I even opened my bible, that forsaken book, but here every page condemned me, and I found it easier, for the time, to drown my conscience, than to face the phantoms with which my past and future life were haunted.

"It was in one of my broken-hearted moments, when I felt myself humbled to the dust, that I accidentally met Sir James Mornford. He saw me in the distance, and drew his hat over his eyes. Finding it impossible otherwise to avoid me, he stopped to attend to something by the way, and then turned his back to the path I had to tread. I think a sudden madness must have seized me, for such was my pity for his forlorn situation,

that I forgot everything else ; and before I was aware of the act, I had addressed him by his name, while holding out my hand towards him.

“ ‘ Sir ! ’ said he, with a tone of inquiry, and a look of blank astonishment, as if we had never met before. I understood his meaning, and passed on ; and from that time we never spoke again.

“ To Mr. West, Sir James condescended to explain his feelings more fully. He even called upon him to thank him, in person, for the good intention by which his letter had been dictated. “ I had no right,” he added, “ to expect more from you. *You* were no personal friend, and this was all which your professional duty required.” In saying this, he placed so peculiar an emphasis upon the word *you*, as to leave no doubt that he considered me, being a personal friend, as bound, by honour and by right feeling, to a very different mode of conduct.

“ All these things galled me so, that my life became a burden. My nerves were shattered, my spirits failed me ; and but for one resource, there were times, when I know not but I might have been tempted to put an end to my miserable existence. But there were also times, when my feelings took a different turn, and when I was subdued to the weakness of a child. Oh ! Eleanor, if in these moods you had been faithful to me—if you had talked to me of the dangers of my besetting sin—how would I have fallen upon your neck, and wept, and made confession of all my guilt, and of all my wretchedness ! How blessed might have been your influence, had you seized these moments to persuade me to be a ‘ wiser and a better man ! ’

“ In one of these moods, you may perhaps remember the day I went with you to church ; feeling I know not how, like a sort of marked man, as if all eyes were upon me.



I was, however, somewhat lulled by the deep melancholy music of the organ, and had begun to feel a sort of calm steal over my spirits, when suddenly my attention was directed towards Sir James Mornford's seat; and there were the four children dressed in their deep mourning, and the servants in mourning too; but no governess, nor any one with them, but those very domestics, against whose tender mercies their poor mother had so earnestly entreated me to protect them. What could I do? I returned home early, on some pretence of professional duty, and, for that day, and the next, was lost to myself and every one besides."

The narrative of Frederick Bond had been strictly correct so far as related to the state of his own feelings. How far he was justified in believing that his wife could actually have saved him from the gulf into which he was plunging, must in this, as in many other cases, remain a matter of doubt. It is, however, an almost invariable rule with those to whom intemperance has become the prevailing malady of their lives, when they take a retrospective view of their own conduct, to assert, and probably to believe, that some other mode of behaviour on the part of those with whom they were associated, could have rescued them from final and irretrievable ruin. It is, perhaps, not often that men complain of their wives for keeping silence in such cases. Speaking too much, or rather with too little regard to fitness of time and manner, is a far more frequent cause of offence.

From this error Eleanor Bond was singularly exempt, but her punishment was not the less, that her fault consisted in an opposite extreme of conduct. She, too, could have told her story of the last five years; but her altered countenance spoke for her—and in that, what a history was

written ! Gradual had been the falling away, of herself, her family, and of one she loved better than herself, from that high station in the world's esteem, which she had prized above all earthly possessions. Her husband had passed that line of demarcation which the world appoints for the boundary between what it sanctions and what it condemns; and consequently, first one friend had forsaken him, and then another, and a sort of stigma had become attached to his character, while his old companions congratulated themselves upon their safety—just within that line, from whence they could laugh at his downfall, and despise his shame.

Eleanor was keenly alive to the injustice and the injury which her husband suffered from those who had once been most solicitous to cultivate his friendship; but she had also deeper cause for suffering than any which this world alone could inflict. She had rejected the counsels of the only friend who had ever evinced a real interest in her eternal happiness; she had resisted the warnings of her own conscience; and she seemed to be sinking deeper and deeper into a state of perplexity and distress, from which no human aid could save her. She had been vain in her ambition, and misguided in her judgment; but she was not hardened against conviction, nor obstinate in her adherence to preconceived opinions. Her father's death, which occurred soon after the partnership between her husband and Mr. West had been dissolved, while it placed in her possession a sum of money barely sufficient to secure herself and her children from absolute want, was an event which had considerable effect in changing the state of her heart with regard to her temporal and spiritual views; and thus she had become gradually an altered character, learning, in the school of

affliction, those important lessons which prosperity and indulgence had utterly failed to teach.

It was chiefly at her desire, for her husband was becoming reckless of everything, that they had left their native place, and settled in a small country village, where they had been informed by Mr. West there was an opening for a professional man; though certainly the practice which this place afforded, was of a very humble and limited kind, when compared with what Frederick Bond in his happier days had been qualified to undertake.

In a picturesque but humble cottage, situated in the outskirts of this village, they fixed their abode, living in the utmost simplicity, and yet endeavouring to cultivate the respect and good will of those around them, by making the best appearance their fallen fortunes would allow.

It could have been an easy matter for Frederick to have secured to himself the entire practice of this village and its neighbourhood; but here again fresh trials awaited his wife, who had the mortification of seeing that first one and then another of the best families around them, were becoming acquainted with her husband's habits, and consequently calling in other medical assistance; so that, in the course of little more than one year, none but the paupers of the parish were left to his skill or his attention.

Eleanor had fondly hoped, that, surrounded by new scenes, and influenced by different associations, her husband would be induced, from all he had felt and suffered, to begin his life afresh, and to let this change in his circumstances be the commencement of better hopes and brighter prospects for the future. She had prepared herself, and was endeavouring to prepare her children, for the sacrifice of every pecuniary indulgence. She had already borne the loss of friends, and the altered aspect of society

towards herself and her husband ; but the principle of hope, still strong within her breast, now pointed to what was more essentially desirable, and she persuaded herself that, deprived of so much of earthly consolation, her husband would now seek the more earnestly to lay hold of that which the world would not be able to take away. What foundation she had for this hope, it would have been difficult to say, except that she prayed fervently that it might be realized ; and while the object of her anxiety cared not to pray for himself, she ceased not from her earnest supplications that he might yet be saved, even though it might seem to be in spite of himself.

In the mean time, Frederick Bond was fast losing the power of resistance against evil. His nerves, as he had described them, indeed shattered, and his imagination was almost always filled with phantoms of horror, with spectres which he sought to subdue by the very means which called them into life. By such means, however, he was enabled to purchase occasional seasons of forgetfulness ; and, what was worse than all to his wife, he purchased also a kind of false and unnatural excitement ; under the influence of which, his puerile jests, his aimless tricks, his vague and heartless merriment, were more difficult to witness with patience and forbearance, than even the gross sleep, and mere animal existence, which occupied the greater portion of his time.

It would have appeared to a stranger, a task of difficult attainment to love such a man ; but well has it been said, that "*love is strong as death ;*" and well has it been proved by the experience of woman, that love can survive the death of pride—of confidence—of hope—of all in short, which in its earlier stages of existence, either combined in its creation, or administered to its support.

The hopes of Eleanor Bond had been reduced to their lowest state, before the conversation took place which we have decribed. But now a new light seemed to burst upon her, for her husband had, of his own accord, made allusion to the subject that was ever present to her thoughts. Her heart was consequently open; and like some captive, whose heavy chains are just broken, she believed that happiness, solid, substantial happiness, would inevitably ensue. What was her disappointment, then, to find, that though her husband would not unfrequently shed tears at the recital of her anxiety and suffering on his behalf, he had in reality lost the power of feeling anything acutely, or of entering with continued interest, even upon the most important concerns of life. He fully agreed with her in all her reasonings, he listened to all her entreaties, he consented, as far as words were concerned, to all her plans; but while he sometimes limited his portion for the day, it was only to add a stronger for the night; and while he freely acknowledged that nothing but total abstinence could save him, he continued to indulge himself with that dangerous little, which he said was absolutely necessary to enable him to resist at all.

“I cannot endure the agony of my own thoughts—I cannot exist under the remembrance of what I have done—I cannot look into the horrible future,” was his constant remonstrance, whenever the hour or the day arrived, which he had previously fixed upon as the commencement of his new system of restraint; and when he met again the calm reproving eye of his wife, he would repeat his accustomed assertion, that if she would only prove to him his innocence of one fatal act, he would from that hour become an altered man.

It was in this state of their domestic affairs, that

Eleanor one day received a letter from her sister, informing her of the alarming illness of Mr. West. An idea at the same moment flashed across her mind, and she determined to act upon it without delay. She determined to go herself, and, if it was possible, obtain an interview with Mr. West, in order to ascertain with certainty whether her husband had really been guilty of the act, which so often afforded a pretext for plunging yet deeper into guilt. Under pretence of visiting her family, she therefore laid her plans before her husband, and it was agreed that she should set out on the following morning.

Amongst other infirmities that were gradually stealing upon Frederick Bond, he was now losing the refreshment of wholesome sleep. The sleep he purchased was heavy and deep, but it was not of long duration; and his early waking hours were the most wretched of his whole life. On the morning of his wife's projected journey, he awoke as usual, and found her already preparing for her departure from home; but fearing to bring upon himself—not her reproaches, for these he seldom had to fear—but her affectionate appeals to his better feelings, he studiously suppressed all signs of intelligence, and allowed her to proceed in her occupations undisturbed. He had retired to rest the night before in his usual manner, and Eleanor, as her custom was, no sooner saw the bright sunbeams on the window near his bed, than she gently drew the curtain over him, lest they should increase the throbbing headache, with which, under his present circumstances, he always awoke. She then with great caution folded down the bedclothes that seemed to interrupt his breathing, raised the pillow underneath his head, placed beside him a glass of pure water, and, returning to the window, opened it just so far as to admit the

fresh morning air, scented with sweetbriar, and all pleasant things that were offering their incense to the rising sun.

After this, the room was silent; and Frederick venturing to open his eyes, discovered that his wife was kneeling in the attitude of prayer, while the expression of her face wore such a look of earnest entreaty, as he never from that moment could forget. It seemed as if the working of her feelings had at last overcome all remembrance of his presence, for she began to speak audibly; and then he found that her soul was labouring with a secret hope, the nature of which he could not ascertain, though of its relation to himself he was left to entertain no doubt. She then prayed earnestly for her children, committing them to the care of their heavenly Father, particularly during her expected absence; and then again, after having risen from the ground, she knelt down, and, bursting into an agony of tears, entreated for the poor prodigal, that he might be brought home to his Father's bosom; that he might be regarded, while yet afar off; and that she and her children might be preserved every day and every hour from saying or doing what might tend to keep him as an alien from his Father's house.

It was impossible for the wretched man, while listening to this prayer, to shut out the burning tears that gushed from his eyes. He had never before been made so fully sensible of his real situation, as it related to his wife and family—he had never before been made so clearly to understand that nothing short of that Power which had been invoked could save him from utter destruction here and hereafter. This conviction seemed to fall upon him at first like a load which he was unable to sustain; and no sooner was he left alone, than he arose, and paced

to and fro in his chamber, the victim of thoughts and apprehensions too wretched for description.

This apartment was a small room on the ground-floor, opening by an old-fashioned lattice, through a perfect bower of roses and sweetbriar, upon a little orchard-green, where his children were accustomed to play. Oppressed with the anguish of his mind, he at last threw open the window, and looked out. He had heard young voices speaking in their pleasant tones of innocence and joy, and he now beheld his children, with their mother, seated round a little breakfast-table under one of the old trees which grew near the house.

It was a beautiful picture, but it did not escape his eye, that they were all eating the coarsest bread, served in the humblest manner, though they had every appearance of enjoying their meal as much as if it had been of the most costly description. For a long time he had leaned against the side of the window, and gazed with fixed attention on this scene without the little party being aware that he was a spectator; but no sooner did one of them make the discovery, than it was whispered to the rest, and almost instantaneously something like a shadow fell upon them all. Their cheerfulness subsided, their laughter died away, and the pleasant schemes they had been forming for all that was to be done in their mother's absence, and the promises they were making her, sunk into silence on their lips; while they ate the remainder of their breakfast without a word or a smile.

Frederick Bond shrunk back into his room; he would willingly have shrunk into the centre of the earth.

"Am I so horrible a monster," he exclaimed, "that I cannot look upon my own children without withering their joy?"





Illustration of a woman and children in a garden.



As he said this, he caught a glimpse of his figure in the glass; and his wonder, if he had felt any, might well have ceased. His face was sallow, his cheeks had fallen into deep hollows, his eyes were red and glaring, his black hair was matted into separate locks, that seemed as if starting from his head. He was wrapped in a loose dressing-gown, and all his movements were accompanied by a certain degree of muscular distortion; especially his face, which was once handsome, but which had lately been disfigured by convulsive twitches, at which his younger children laughed, while the older ones were afraid.

"No wonder," said he, "they shun and hate me. I envy them the power of escaping from such a monster; but how shall I escape from myself?"

He then swallowed his accustomed morning draught, and before his wife had come to take leave of him, he had begun to feel more the master of himself.

"Frederick," said Eleanor, returning again after she had bid him good-bye, "this is the first time I have left you and the children alone; for their sakes—for mine, may I ask of you one kindness?"

"What is it?"

"Will you abstain—will you endeavour to be your better-self, until my return?"

"Impossible! Heaven knows I gladly would, if the power was in me; but you know, Eleanor, it is impossible."

"All things are possible with God, Frederick. Will you not ask him to help you?"

"I dare not."

"Of what are you afraid?" Surely there is more to dread in the daily violation of his holy law, than in the

simple act which he has himself enjoined — the act of coming to him in simplicity of heart, to ask his pardon for the past, and his aid in resisting temptation for the future.”

“But my sins are beyond all hope of pardon.”

“They are, while persisted in; not otherwise.”

“You forget that I am a murderer.”

“I do not forget that you believe yourself to be so. Yet, even for the murderer, there is hope of pardon. Do not, dear Frederick, attempt to measure your culpability by the opinions of men. I have heard you say, yourself, that it is the simple nature of sin, as such, which makes it hateful in the sight of God; and though some sins may be more offensive and injurious to society than others, all are equally forbidden by the divine law. If, therefore, we would in reality take the Bible as our guide, we must believe that the murderer is not more guilty, than the man who appropriates his neighbour's goods; the drunkard, than he who cherishes in the secret of his heart the spirit of envy or revenge.

“Take courage, then, dear Frederick. Some of us are sorely beset with temptations of many kinds. You have one prevailing temptation. Direct, then, all your efforts against this deadly enemy, and when once effectually conquered, it will be conquered for life. Farewell, dear Frederick; if you find yourself lonely when I am gone, remember that God is near you, waiting to be gracious. And now, once more, farewell. Take care of the dear children; and may their heavenly Father bless and protect you all!”

With these words Eleanor departed, and her miserable husband was left, as it appeared to him, without one consolation, or one hope. Tormented with perpetual restlessness, he went into the little parlour where he was

accustomed to breakfast, and here he found his eldest daughter seated at her sewing. She started up on seeing him enter, and immediately brought in his breakfast. It was a choice and savoury repast, such as Elcanor always had in preparation for him, whenever he chose to partake of it; and he could not help this morning comparing it with the homely meal he had seen his wife and children eating in the garden some hours before. As soon as his little daughter had placed it on the table, she sat down to her sewing again, and only looked up occasionally, to see whether her father wanted anything she could bring.

Gladly would Frederick Bond have sharpened his appetite this morning, by adding to his coffee the usual portion of brandy, with which he was accustomed to strengthen it, but there seemed to him, in the presence of the quiet little girl who sat beside him, endeavouring to supply her mother's place, a sort of sacredness, which he was not yet so hardened as to violate.

"Mary," said he, "do you always eat that brown bread for your breakfast, which I saw you eating this morning?"

"Yes, always."

"And have you always those wooden bowls for your milk?"

"Oh, yes; we like them better, because they never break."

"And does your mother always eat the brown bread and milk with you?"

"Yes, when she eats anything; but she sometimes goes almost without a breakfast at all."

"Do you think she likes the bread and milk?"

"I don't think she does like it much; no more did Henry and Isabel at first, but we are all getting to like it

now; and mamma is always trying to persuade us to eat the simplest and cheapest food, because she says we shall have to do so some time, and it is better to do it now while we are young, and healthy, and happy, than to wait until we are forced, and may neither be so strong, nor so well able to eat coarse food."

Frederick now recollected that his children never dined with him, and the idea struck him, that perhaps they lived through the day on the same hard and homely fare. He recollected that his wife generally made excuses when she sat down with him, that she had previously dined with the children, thinking it best to keep order amongst them by her own presence; and he recollected, too, that his own little board was always spread with dainties—with the game that was in season, or with some choice viands cooked so as to tempt his failing appetite, and always served up in such a manner, as to avoid reminding him that he was not a gentleman still.

"And these poor creatures," said he to himself, "have been all the while living like the paupers of the parish! He could scarcely swallow the morsel he had put into his mouth; and if ever man loathed himself, he did so at that moment. By way of diverting his thoughts, however, he made an effort to change the subject of conversation.

"Who are you working for, Mary?" he inquired.

The child blushed deeply, while she answered, "I am making a shirt."

Her father had asked the question with the most perfect indifference as to any answer she might make; but her embarrassment awakened his curiosity, and he went on.

"Is it for me, or for your brother?"

“Oh, it is too large for George,” said Mary, endeavouring to smile away her blushes.

“It is for me then, I suppose. Why don’t you answer me, Mary?”

The child burst into tears. “It is a secret,” said she; “my mother charged me not to bring this work into the room where you were; but I felt sure you would never notice it, and so I disobeyed her commands, and now she has hardly been gone an hour, and my judgment has come upon me.”

“But what secret can you have, Mary, about a shirt?”

“Oh, don’t ask me, father. I dare not tell a falsehood, and yet I must not betray my mother’s secret; she has kept it so long.”

“Poor child!” said Frederick, in a voice so kind, and so unusual, that Mary’s little heart was melted; and looking up through her tears, she said, “I am sure you would like my mother better if you knew, and yet I hardly dare tell you.”

“Well, Mary, I will leave it to you. If your mother has ever charged you not to tell me—if you have promised her that you would not—I cannot urge you to break your trust.”

“No, she has never charged me at all; she has never even mentioned the subject directly, but she has been so studious to keep it from you, that we all know her wishes; and ought we not to regard them as much as her word?”

“Certainly you ought; but in this instance I do beg you will tell me the whole truth; it may be of the utmost consequence, both to your mother and to me.”

Mary looked anxiously at her father, and then began her story.

“Well, then, we take in a great deal of plain sewing;

my mother, and Eleanor, and Isabel, and I. We all get up at five every morning, and a shirt is sometimes almost made before your breakfast."

"And you do this for pay?"

"Oh, yes; and mamma tells us all about the house-keeping, and how much it saves to eat such and such things, and to wear our common frocks; until sometimes she smiles, and says, she is afraid we shall become lovers of money."

"And what do you do with all that you make, and all that you save?"

"Why, first, there is George's schooling, about which mamma thinks a great deal, and all the housekeeping; and Isabel's doctor's bill; and the wages of the servant—all these take a great deal of money to pay, and there is also another thing, which mamma keeps a great secret."

Frederick was afraid to pursue the subject further; but the child having once plunged into her mother's secrets, thought it just as well to tell the whole as a part. She therefore went on:—

"I am sure you will love mamma, as we all do, when I tell you, that for years she has been trying to afford to keep a pony for you, for she persists in it, that you are not in good health, though we all think you are a great deal better than she is herself. Yet she says it would do you so much good to ride out every day; that it is a hard thing for a man who has been accustomed to riding to do without a horse; that it would give you more respectability in the neighbourhood, and many other things that we don't quite understand. However, we all work for this great object; and last winter we had nearly accomplished it, when there came in at Christmas, that long, long



bill from the cruel wine merchant, for things which my mother never knew of, but which she said must be paid for before we thought of the pony. "I shall never forget how she cried that day. Indeed, we all cried to see her so distressed; and the worst was, poor George could not go to school for a whole quarter, because there was not money enough to pay his master and the wine merchant too; so he grew quite idle and mischievous, and lost more than he had gained for three months before."

And thus the child went on in her simplicity, disclosing more and more of the details of her mother's economy, little dreaming that every word she uttered went like a dagger to her father's heart. He had dropped his knife upon his plate, his coffee remained untasted, and he sat with his elbow resting on the table, and his forehead shaded by his hand, apparently occupied with the pattern of a napkin which he was folding and unfolding, wholly unconscious of what he did.

"You may take away those things, Mary," he said, when he felt that he could bear no more. And as soon as the child had disappeared, he rushed into his own room, and bolted the door.

"Have I then been such a wretch!" he exclaimed, "Yes, I have eaten my children's bread, and reduced my wife to the grade of a common beggar! a village sempstress! a taker-in of plain work! She who was once so elegant in all her tastes, and who ought to have been cherished as the only treasure of my life.

"If they had shut me in dungeons, and fed me with loathsome food, I could have borne it; but I have been a pampered ingrate, fattening on the luxuries which want has purchased! where, where shall I find an ocean that will wash me pure from this pollution!"

"The shadows of evening were far advanced that day, while the miserable man was still pacing the round of his little chamber. Mary had knocked gently at his door many times during the last few hours, and she now knocked again, to say that her younger brother was undressed, and going to bed, and wished to bid his papa good-night.

Frederick opened the door, and the little cherub sprang into his arms, at the same time looking anxiously round the apartment, as if he had expected to find his mother.

His father kissed him, and bid him good-night, but still he did not seem satisfied to go.

"What does he want?" asked the father.

"He has been accustomed," replied Mary, "to say a little prayer before he went to bed; and as my mother is not here, and he always says it in this room, perhaps you will let him kneel beside you, just for a few moments; we will not stay long."

It was a novel situation for such a parent to be placed in; but Frederick almost mechanically seated himself in the old nursery chair, and the child knelt down at his feet, with its little rosy hands folded on his knees, its blue eyes raised, and its golden tresses thrown back from its snow-white temples, over the infant-neck and shoulders, which its half-undress had left uncovered.

The prayer of one whose experience has been long in this world, is necessarily clogged with so many interruptions of thought, so many associations and recollections, that it seems at best but a struggle of the soul to make itself heard. But the prayer of a child is like the unsophisticated voice of nature, passing from its pure bosom at once into the skies.

There are few hearts so hardened as to resist the impression made by this innocent and artless appeal; and

Frederick Bond was peculiarly disposed, on the night we have described, to be softened into more than common tenderness. He laid his hand upon the shining tresses of his child. He bent his head over him, and his lips also uttered an involuntary prayer, against which the gates of mercy were not closed.

He slept not the whole of that long night; yet restless, anxious, apprehensive as he was, he was enabled, in the midst of a host of midnight horrors, to abstain from his besetting sin. The next morning he breakfasted with his children around him; and if he did not join them in their humble fare, it was simply because, after many un-availing attempts, he found he had lost the power to do so. This day appeared, if possible, still longer than the night. He could not read. He could not even think to any purpose. He could only feel, and feeling had lately been the bane of his life. His children were all busy with their different occupations. He knew not what to do: but still he was able to abstain.

On the following morning he was so fortunate as to form a scheme with which all the young spirits around him were so elated, that he could not refuse to rejoice in their gladness. He projected an excursion to a neighbouring hill, a dinner in a wood, and a walk home in the cool of the evening. All this, however, was only happiness for others. This brought little satisfaction to him. The third day was one of peculiar trial. The remembrance of Lady Mornford's death came freshly back upon him with the first dawn of the morning, and haunted him through the whole day. Still, however, he resisted, for though he believed it would be impossible, with this load upon his mind, to support the burden of consciousness through the whole of his future life, yet having

already passed three days without his accustomed stimulus, he determined to await the return of his wife, and thus to prove how much his affection for her could enable him to accomplish.

In this manner his weary life was passed, sometimes hoping, sometimes even praying; but far more frequently sinking into a state of utter despondency and horror, until nearly the expiration of the time his wife had expected to be absent. It wanted now but one day to that of her return, and the children rose early with the happy word "to-morrow" perpetually upon their lips. Even he himself felt a secret spring of joy, as he walked with them in the little garden which surrounded their cottage, and watched them plucking out the weeds that might otherwise offend their mother's sight, sweeping away the leaves from her favourite walk, and peeping with expectant eyes at the fruit, which they hoped would be fully ripened by the hour of her return.

In this manner they were all engaged, when their attention was attracted by the sound of a carriage wheeling down the lane, and round by the corner of the garden, until it stopped at their own cottage-door.

"It is my mother. It is herself come a day sooner," was echoed by all the happy voices at once. And so indeed it was. She sprang from the chaise, embraced as many of her children as her arms could contain at once, and, walking up to her husband, looked again and again into his face; for the eye of affection is not easily deceived, and she could not but perceive that some blessed change had taken place.

"Come with me, Frederick, will you?" she said, "and help me to unfasten my trunk."

They went together into the bed-room. She then

bolted the door, and, placing her arm affectionately over his shoulder, said in a voice of subdued ecstasy, "I have seen Mr. West, and I have welcome tidings to tell you. The good man is on his death-bed. In a few days I might have been too late. We had a long conversation about you." He was surprised and shocked at your suspicions; and bade me assure you, in the most solemn manner, that you had nothing whatever to do with the death of Lady Mornford. 'Indeed,' said he, 'I took care myself that no injury should be done, for when I saw the situation your husband was in, I undertook the operation myself. But the case was worse than we had anticipated, and her previous habits—her spirits having been for some time almost entirely supported by stimulants—would, under any circumstances, have rendered her recovery doubtful.

"'Tell your husband,' he added, 'he has nothing to fear from the past. It is with the future that he has to do. And may God in his mercy strengthen and protect him for the time to come!'"

Frederick Bond had listened to this intelligence with clasped hands, and eyes upraised. He uttered not a word; but, sinking on his knees beside the bed, with his wife pressed close to his bosom, he breathed a solemn vow, that if God would mercifully grant him the power to resist, he would never again transgress his holy law, by touching that which had been the bane of his past life.

This vow, made as it was without presumption, and without self-dependence, he was enabled to keep. He did not, as so many thousands have done, venture to play with the poison he had forsworn, but renounced it wholly and for ever.

The effects of this resolution, so far as they related to temporal affairs, were soon visible in the happiness of his family, in the restoration of his respectability, and in his peace of mind.

For the more lasting effects of that resolution, which Divine mercy prompted him to make, and enabled him to keep, we must look to the regions of eternal rest, and count one blessed spirit the more, amongst those who dwell for ever in purity and light.

## CHAP. IV.

## CONFESSIONS OF A MANIAC.

FROM my well-known interest in all establishments for the protection of the insane, I had no difficulty in obtaining admission to that of ——. I had already inspected many of their apartments, in company with the matron, when she was suddenly called away, and I was left to pursue my observations in a manner better suited to my taste.

Amongst other interesting objects, my attention was attracted by the countenance and manners of a middle-aged female, who strongly reminded me of the picture of Mrs. Siddons as the tragic muse. This lady—for a lady she certainly was—beckoned me towards her, and told me with a look of great meaning, that she wished to relate to me her history. She complained bitterly of her confinement, and added, that, when she had told me all, I should judge whether the mode of treatment in that institution was not the worst that could possibly be adopted in her case.

These complaints, with the prevailing idea so frequent amongst the insane, that the body rather than the mind requires to be restored to health, convinced me that there was more of malady in her case than met the eye. There was, however, at the same time, so much intelligence in the expression of her face, such evident superiority in her manners and appearance, and traces still so striking of what had once been beauty of the highest order, that I felt strongly tempted to listen to her story. The consequence was, I found myself, on the following day, by permission of the authorities of the place, seated in her little apartment, while she opened the narrative, (which would doubtless have been told to

any other listener as attentive as myself) in the following simple manner:—

We lived in a pleasant habitation in the midst of a lovely garden, my sister Lillah, and I. My mother died when Lillah was a baby; and my father, who had nothing else to love, thought we were the best and the prettiest children in the world. And so perhaps we were. At least I may speak of Lillah, for the wild rose on its waving bough was not more delicate or fair. For myself, “men said that I was beautiful;” and the people of our village, and the strangers who came to our house, paid me the most marked and flattering attentions, I can well remember—but these things have all passed away, and it behoves me now to be silent in the dust.

My father took great pleasure in our education, especially mine; for I had talents to lay hold of every branch of learning, and a thirst so insatiable for every kind of knowledge, that often, when I ought to have been attending to my domestic duties, I was buried in the pages of ancient history, or occupied by the investigation of some disputed point in philosophy or science. Nor were the lighter accomplishments of female education forgotten. Music was the amusement of my father’s leisure hours. With me it was a passion; for nothing else seemed to satisfy my soul. Music, however, though it satisfied me for a time, was apt to leave me melancholy and depressed; and the result of my various pursuits was only this—that all was vanity.

To my sister, the aspect of the world, and the tenour of life, were as opposite to mine, as if we had lived in two different planets. Tormented by no aspiring dreams, but simple in her tastes, domestic, quiet, meek, and pleased with little things, she was uniformly cheerful; and her



happy voice used to be heard in the house and the garden, singing as gaily as a young bird.

Lillah was five years younger than myself, it was therefore my duty, and sometimes I fancied it was my pleasure, to attend to her learning. My system of instruction, however, was too fitful and capricious to be attended with any striking results, and she was too happy in her partial ignorance to feel anything like ardour in the pursuit of greater knowledge.

Notwithstanding these deficiencies, my sister was so lovely and so loving, so gentle and so kind, it was impossible not to regard her with feelings of the utmost tenderness; and my father and I, though she occupied but little of our attention, would either of us have defended her from danger at the peril of our lives. Besides this, I know not how it was, but Lillah, in her own little sphere of usefulness, was accustomed to accomplish more than I ever did in mine; for such was her love of order, and the simple and direct application of such talents as she had cultivated, to whatever end she had in view, that she became, as she advanced in years, the support of our domestic comfort, without losing anything of her refinement, her gaiety, or of that indescribable loveliness, which seemed less to be a part of her nature, than to shine like a halo around her wherever she went.

These were our days of happiness. Every one has some such point to look back to, that seems in the distant past like a green island of rest, in the troubled ocean of life; and this was mine: for we lived together so harmoniously, and yet were all so different. Perhaps it was from that very reason, that we never interfered with each other's sphere of action; but all seemed rather to supply what might otherwise have been found wanting in one.

Such was the tenour of our lives, when my father's failing health rendered it necessary for him to engage a curate; and a gentleman accordingly came down from Cambridge, with the highest recommendations to my father's confidence and esteem.

We had expected to see a youth whose education was but just completed; but we found a man of nearly thirty, whose serious turn of thought, and studious habits, had combined with his religious impressions, to induce him to choose the life of a clergyman; and as he was not in want of money, and preferred residing in the country, he was perfectly satisfied with the humble sphere of action which my father's offer opened to his choice.

"What do you think of his appearance?" asked Lillah, the first time we were left alone together, after he had made his call at the parsonage. And without waiting for an answer, she went on—"He frightens me to death. I am sure if I were to make the slightest blunder in the use, or even the accent of a word, it would offend his ear. I am determined, however, not to care for him; but to talk on in my usual way, the same as if he was not present; and if he thinks my conversation too trifling for his notice, he may turn to you. But tell me what you think of him, Flora?"

She repeated the question, and looked anxiously for my answer; but neither on this occasion, nor on any subsequent one, was I able for a long time to make up my mind. I had been accustomed to admiration, both from my equals, and from those who could neither understand nor appreciate me; but this man seemed quite insensible to my superiority. I had been accustomed to flattery; but the tenour of his conversation, though it could not be called rude, was calculated to rob me of all false pre-

tensions, and reduce me to the scale of an ordinary woman. I had been accustomed to take the lead in conversation—to be drawn out, and made way for, as in my opinion was law to the society in which I moved, but now I often felt myself involuntarily shrinking back, as if I possessed not a single sentiment worth uttering.

I will call our new acquaintance Emile, for it is of no consequence to you or to me, what was his real name. Suffice it, that he became associated, not only with our domestic arrangements, but with our pleasures, our studies, and with all things in which my father had been accustomed to take a part. Indeed, we became more than ever dependent upon such a companion, for, as I said before, my father's health failed rapidly, and he had an affection of the head which disqualified him for all literary pursuits.

My sister, unlike me in this, as in all other things, soon recovered her self-possession in the presence of our new friend. She even talked to him with the utmost composure, about such trifles as I felt sure must excite his contempt. Yet she did this with so much simplicity, that he smiled, and replied to her as kindly as he would have done to a sweet child.

To me his behaviour was very different; for while he candidly expressed his disapprobation of the manner in which I spent my time, he was solicitous to lead my thoughts to subjects of more vital importance; and I learned, before he had been long associated with us, that the reason why he treated my sentiments and opinions with so little respect, was that they were not founded, strictly speaking, on religious principles. I had, it is true, a kind of sentimental religion of my own; but it was chiefly against this specious kind of delusion that he levelled that severity of judgment, which I felt but too

keenly in his general behaviour towards me. It was to me an entirely new idea, that by becoming religious, I should become more interesting. Yet no sooner had it taken possession of my mind, than I read, and talked, and acted in a different manner from what I had ever done before; and if I did not altogether feel religiously, it was what few would have discovered, who listened to my conversation, or examined the volumes of theology with which my library was stored.

I had before been a Greek scholar, and I now took up the study of Hebrew, under the idea so common amongst ladies, that by dabbling in these languages I should be able to understand the bible better. As if the labours of learned and holy men, devoted through their whole lives to this one study, would not have thrown greater light upon the subject than I was likely to enjoy; or as if, in the lapse of centuries, the critical examination of contending parties would not have discerned more errors than I should be able to detect.

To Hebrew, however, I turned my attention, and Emile was my instructor. He found me an apt scholar, and he was evidently pleased with the task; for if there was one occupation he preferred to all others, it was that of imparting knowledge.

While we were employed in this manner, Lillah sometimes sate quietly beside us, engaged with her needle-work, and sometimes she playfully rallied us upon the depth and the gravity of our studies; but she never joined us; and one day, when I asked her why, she replied with a look of more than common seriousness—"Why, to tell the truth, I find in my bible already, so much more of what I can understand, than what I am willing to practise, that I should be afraid to know more, lest my condemnation should be greater than it is."

"I believe you are right," said Emile; and he fixed upon her a long earnest gaze, under which she blushed so beautifully, that a man less wise might have been forgiven, had he studied no more Hebrew for that day.

It was on this occasion, the idea first struck me, that, young as Lillah was, she might possibly be romantic enough to entertain a feeling of more than friendship for our new acquaintance; and I was confirmed in my fears a few days after, by finding that she had carefully preserved a rose he had presented to her in our walk.

"Lillah," said I, "why have you kept that rose with so much care?"

The child—for such I had been accustomed to consider her—blushed deeply, while she answered me with her accustomed simplicity and truth, "Emile gathered it for me; and as it was the first he ever gave me, I thought I would try how long I could keep it alive."

"Take care, Lillah," said I, "take care. Those who gather roses, are not always so considerate as to present them without thorns."

She did not appear to understand my meaning, and the suspicion which had glanced across my mind, passed away, for I had so much to occupy me in my new pursuits, that I thought little of my sister, or the state of her young heart.

The fact was, that with my newly acquired religious views, I had taken upon myself the patronage of village schools; and instead of poring over the pages of ancient divines, I was now more frequently seen on my way to the school-house, with a packet of books in my hand, and a troop of children following me to the place of rendezvous. In the Sunday school, as well as in other institutions connected with the church, I was a zealous

and indefatigable agent; for it was a part of my character to prosecute whatever I undertook with all the energies of my mind. It would have been a puzzling question, had any one asked me what was my real motive: my ostensible one, was that of doing good in the sphere of action to which Providence had called me.

Pleased as Emile had been with my study of his favourite authors, he was evidently more so with the new turn my energies had taken; and as we went together hand in hand with our charities and good works, by degrees I became reconciled to the humiliating influence he had exercised over me in the correction of my false sentiments, and ill-founded pretensions. I was even pleased to be corrected, when he did it with gentleness and candour; but my highest reward was the expression of his approbation, when I had been particularly solicitous for the good of some of his humblest parishioners. Perhaps I should, with more propriety, have said, that these were our days of happiness; for when I look back to the times when I used to come home tired from my village rambles, when my father smiled to see me thus occupied, when Lillah welcomed me to her social and well-spread tea-table, when Emile used to join us for the evening, and I afterwards took my harp, and sung to them some of the melodies we loved to listen to.—Oh! where are those blessed moments fled? I thought I was again in the old parsonage house—that my youth had come back to me—my innocence and my peace; and, behold! I am here, within the walls of this dungeon, a companion to the gibbering idiot, and the raving madman.

But I forget to tell you about Lillah. She was not indifferent or inactive in my benevolent occupations, but she was one of those who think their first

duty is at home ; and as my father's malady increased, and he could not well be left alone, she was his faithful companion in the house, and often accompanied him to meet me on my return from the village school.

My father's illness had commenced with a slight paralytic seizure. It was followed by many symptoms of relapse, and in a short time he was reduced to a melancholy state of imbecility, and helplessness. My sister's strength was consequently much tried ; yet while I saw her suffering, and would gladly have relieved her, I could not believe myself called upon to renounce the high station I had assumed, as patroness of the poor.

Emile was the first to remind me, that it is possible, with the best intentions, to mistake our sphere of duty.

"We act, too frequently," he said, "as if we thought we were necessary to God, from the assistance we render him in carrying out his benevolent designs. And in order to convince us of this error, and to prove that his own power is all-sufficient, we are often called away from public usefulness, to fill a place so humble, that it would seem, to human wisdom, better calculated for another, and a far inferior agent.

"Do you think then," said I, "that my sphere of duty is in my father's chamber?"

"Certainly I do."

"But you know he is so changed—so lost to himself, and others, that a common nurse would wait upon him, and probably please him better than I could."

"Lillah does not reason thus."

I said no more ; but renounced my schools : at least so far as related to my personal influence, and determined from that moment, that my sister should not be before me in devotedness to a parent who so justly merited every

kindness from us both : I might add, especially from me, for I had ever been the pride and the joy of his heart. From Lillah he expected all those little feminine attentions which it is the part of a daughter to pay, but he looked upon me as a superior being, whose talents and capabilities were mis-directed in so humble a channel. The being in the world who held the next highest place in his admiration, was Emile, and I could easily perceive, from the time of his first becoming intimate with our family, that my father in his own mind, believed us destined for each other. The poor people of our village, as well as many of our friends, thought the same ; and I must myself have been more or less than woman, had I not been sensible of the adaptation of character which seemed to fit us equally, for enjoyment, and for usefulness.

I may surely acknowledge now, that I had had my share of admirers ; but for none had I ever felt sufficient respect, for him to exercise over me the slightest influence, either for good or for evil. With Emile the case was widely different. Whatever I was to others, to him I was submissive, gentle, and meek ; and he had only to express his disapprobation of any particular habit I had formed, for me to renounce it altogether.

But to return to my story. During a whole summer, while my father remained in the helpless state I have described, Lillah and I took it by turns to sit with him, while the other enjoyed the benefit of the fresh air, during an evening ramble, in which Emile was our frequent companion ; and I could not help remarking that my sister calculated upon her evening's walk with more than common interest.

Knowing, as I did, the influence of Emile's conversation, and the indescribable charm of his kindness, I some-



times trembled for my poor sister, lest the calm of her simple life should be disturbed by the stirring of a feverish dream, which she could never hope to see realized—the misery of an unrequited attachment.

I would have warned her of this danger, but feared to wound her delicacy; and so we went on, until one night, when it was my turn to sit up with my father, and I went to bid Lillah good night after she had retired to rest.

I found her in tears, the cause of which I could but too well divine, for she had had a longer walk with Emile that evening. I kissed her more affectionately than usual; but still I could not touch upon the state of her heart, for I felt what a wretched thing it must be to make confession of an unrequited attachment. And, for Emile! I desired to encourage her by my manner to speak for herself, and this she seemed about to do, for she hung with her arms around my neck, and only wept the more when I attempted to leave her.

“Don’t leave me yet, Flora,” said she, “I have a secret to tell you; only I cannot tell how to begin. I think if you would put the candle out, I could tell you better;” and she hid her face in my neck, and I felt her tears; but still they did not seem to me like tears of sorrow.

“Poor child,” thought I, “it is meet that thy shame, and thy blushes, should be buried in a sister’s bosom; yet how shall I find words to tell her that she loves in vain.”

“Flora,” she began again, “we have long loved Emile.”

“Yes, as a friend.”

“You, Flora, have loved him as a friend; but to-night I have learned that he has been something more than a friend to me.”

“Dearest Lillah,” said I, “you pain me to the heart. It is not yet too late. I entreat you to rouse yourself from this delusion.”

She started from my shoulder. “From what delusion?” she exclaimed. You surely do not suspect me of being guilty of bestowing my affections unasked. No, Flora, I have heard this night what I could not have believed from lips less true—that Emile loves me.”

“Beware, Lillah,” said I, “the heart is deceitful. You must have misunderstood his meaning.”

“No, Flora,” she answered firmly, “do not think so meanly of me. Emile is not a man to trifle on such a subject, besides he spoke too plainly; and I have given him my permission to lay the matter before my father, the first time he finds him capable of attending to it. I do not wonder at your surprise. It could not be greater than my own to think that he should dream of such an insignificant being as I am, and you always near him. Oh, Flora, what a happiness it is now, that you have never regarded him except as a friend!”

Like the traveller who has dreamed of leafy bowers and crystal streams, and awakes to find himself in the midst of a wide burning desert; I saw at once my real situation. I sat, I believe, for the space of an hour by the side of my sister’s bed, for her secret once told, she grew eloquent on the subject that was next her heart, and fortunately waited not for my reply to anything she said.

I know not how I attended upon my poor father that night, or any of the nights or days which followed. I know not, in short, how I endured existence; for the sun of my life was set, and from that hour there grew neither leaf, nor flower, nor any pleasant thing beside my path.

My religion, like the morning dew, all passed away—my learning, what was it worth—my beauty, I regarded it not. One grain of real faith, one spark of heavenly love, one hour of fervent prayer, might possibly have saved me. But the high station I had taken in the religious world, had been all without foundation in my heart; and I now saw, and trembled at the extent of my delusion. All the benevolent offices, the charities, the good works, in which I had taken so much delight, became to my transformed and vitiated taste as worse than weariness. My schools were an absolute disgust. The poor children of the parish, whom, in the presence of Emile, I had so often stooped to caress, now gambolled in my path unheeded; and the village matrons wondered that I passed their doors without a smile of recognition.

The aspect under which I had seen the world was now robbed of its enchantment by a single stroke. Points of duty which I had before been so solicitous to discover, now stood forth in the great desert which I trod, and, naked, and uninviting, forced themselves upon my sight; while the freshness and the greenness with which my imagination had adorned the Christian's path, vanished from before me, and left not a trace of their beauty behind.

All this, however, belonged only to my own private experience. As for those around me, they were too happy, to discover any change in my feelings, even if I had not had pride enough to conceal it.

As Lillah had proposed, the subject was laid before my father, in one of his most lucid moments. He appeared to understand it fully; and even listened to it as something not altogether new. Nothing, however, could induce him to substitute my sister for me. Pleased

with the prospect of one of his daughters being settled so satisfactorily, he entered into calculations about the necessary preparations, only whenever the name of Lillah was mentioned, he nodded his assent, and said, "Yes, I understand you. It is Flora you mean. The whole affair is perfectly intelligible to me. I do not see how it should have turned out otherwise. They were formed to make each other happy."

In this manner we spent the remainder of that summer, when my health began so evidently to give way, that even Lillah, happy as she was, could not fail to perceive it. I had lost the power either to eat, or sleep, and had a constant gnawing pain under one shoulder, for which the doctors recommended me to take a small quantity of brandy after every meal.

I am particular in mentioning this, because you shall see what it led to; for though the medical advice was, that I should take only a tea-spoonful in a wine-glass of water, I soon found that twice that quantity made the dose more palatable, and I fancied also it afforded me more relief. By degrees I discovered that the same medicine might be used to blunt the edge of mental, as well as bodily feeling; and when I had taken more than my accustomed draught, I felt equal to sitting beside Emile and Lillah, and hearing them lay plans for their future happiness.

They were to be married that winter, for my father's was a lingering malady, and there were many reasons why it was desirable that we should be provided with a protector before his death. This event, however, was nearer than we had any of us anticipated. He was seized with alarming symptoms of a new character, and after three days of suffering, we saw that his end was

approaching. The last words he said to Emile, were to commend us to his kindness and protection. My sister had left the apartment for a moment, and we were standing by the side of his bed.

"Lillah," said he, "will be to you as a child. You will love her for her sister's sake, and mine. Flora," he added, "holding both our hands in his, will be the blessing of your life. Take her, Emile, as my dying bequest. She is worthy of your choice."

I thought—and I think still, it was cruel of Emile to shrink away as he did, when my father placed our hands together. He might have humoured a dying man in the delusion that possessed his fancy; instead of which, he actually seemed to shudder as his hand touched mine.

Lillah returned, but she was too late to receive my father's blessing. He had fallen back on his pillow, and from that moment he never spoke again.

We had been so long prepared for his death, by the imbecility which had gradually weaned him from us as a companion and a guide, that we could not be expected to suffer from that poignancy of sorrow, which those must feel, who lose a friend in the full possession of his mental powers. Our grief, however, was not less sincere, for never was a father more deservedly beloved than ours.

It may readily be imagined how valuable were the friendship and the kindness of Emile, on this melancholy occasion. He was all that the most affectionate and devoted brother could have been to us, so that the solemn day of the funeral came on, without our having to exert ourselves to perform any of those painful duties, for which the real mourners for the dead are generally so ill prepared.

On the morning of that day, we met Emile as usual.

Lillah and I entered the parlour at different doors. It was the first time either Emile or I had seen her in deep mourning; and whether it was the contrast with her dress I know not, but there was something in her complexion so unusually pale, that we both started, and then looked at each other.

Emile kindly took her hand, and asked if she was well. To which she replied with a smile, she believed so, but that she often felt particularly weak in the early part of the day, and now that she had less need for exertion, she thought she felt her weakness more.

From this moment Emile watched her with more than a parent's tenderness. It was but too evident that her situation demanded all his solicitude. Her appearance underwent a rapid change, though she was still unable to say that she felt any pain.

We sent for the most able physician of the day, and he candidly told us nothing could save her. Emile was incredulous. He sent for another, and then a third; but they all told the same truth. And we discovered at last, that Lillah had been concealing from us some of the symptoms of that insidious kind of consumption, that steals upon youth and beauty like the natural fading of a flower. Perhaps she did not understand it herself, for it was unlike her to deceive. Perhaps she would not believe in the fact they foretold—and no wonder—no wonder life was sweet, to one so circumstanced.

If I had never loved Emile before my sister's illness, I must have loved him then. All that was magnanimous in his nature was called forth, to help him to endure this stroke; all that was generous in his heart, to comfort and support us both; all that was sterling in his principles, to exemplify the virtue of true Christian resignation;

## CONFESSIONS OF A MANIAC.

and all that was tender in his feelings to soothe, not only the object of his devoted affection, but even me.

I have watched him sometimes in that sick room, and listened to the tones of his modulated voice, until I could not help wondering how it was with Lillah, that she could be so willing to die, and to leave the enjoyment of so much earthly happiness as she might have possessed with him.

She, poor girl, though day by day becoming weaker, was mercifully supported on her sick bed by that holy faith which she had for a long time been cherishing in her meek and quiet soul.

For myself, it would be impossible to describe how my mind was tossed. Wave after wave seemed to roll over me. Sometimes I started with a shudder from strange calculations I had been almost unconsciously making, about Lillah's death. At other times, I am certain I would freely have given my life to save her; for what could I ever be to Emile, even when Lillah was in her grave?

It may easily be supposed that all this while I had an increased tendency to apply to those means of supporting my mental and bodily exertions, which the doctors had so strongly recommended; and having almost entirely lost my natural appetite for wholesome food, and being also kept in attendance upon my sister through the greater part of every night, the habit of recurring to such means for stimulus and support, increased rapidly upon me; until I was sometimes scarcely sensible of my actual situation, and certainly far from being so distressed as I otherwise should have been, at the prospect of a final separation from my sister.

There were times, however, when I felt but too keenly

that, by this separation, I should lose the only being upon earth who really loved me. There were times, when I watched the fever burning on her cheek, and wished it could be translated to my own, that she might live a happy peaceful life on earth, and that I might pass away and be forgotten.

Lillah was so beautiful, too, in her illness—so filled with sweet thoughts for those around her, it must have been a harder heart than mine that could have withstood her inexpressible tenderness. She had always been lovely and attractive; but the progress of her disease, with the advancement of her religious experience, not only deepened the lines of her former beauty, but added a spiritual character to the expression of her countenance; so that we could not help feeling, as we sate beside her, as if in the presence of some purified being, about to be translated to its native sphere of peace, and joy, and love.

“Oh, take me with thee, sweet sister, to that better land to which thou art hastening!” was the language of my heart, as I bent over her, singing, as I often did, at her request, those favourite hymns which seemed to soothe her feverish moments; and then she used to fold her thin white hands upon her bosom, and fix, as if upon the gates of heaven, her clear blue eyes, now grown so large, that but for the shadow of their long dark lashes, they would have looked almost wild.

I know not how it was, but her glance became so penetrating, that sometimes, when she turned her eyes suddenly upon me, I used to start; and when I searched my heart to discover why, perhaps I had fallen into some strange reverie about her being gone; and Emile and I being left alone; and then I know a guilty blush used to rush into my face, for once or twice Lillah asked me the



reason. Yet I will say, in justice to myself, that I was faithful to her both in heart and hand ; and if ever these dark dreams came over me, it was only to be dismissed with as much horror, as she herself would have felt, had she known them.

I have said that Lillah was so beautiful, so gentle, and so kind, that it was our happiness to be near her ; and hitherto she had suffered so little pain, that we would willingly have kept her on her sick-bed, rather than witness the breaking of the frail cord which bound her still to earth.

We could, however, no longer deceive ourselves with regard to the change that was taking place. Increase of fever was followed by increase of inflammation, and then came restlessness and ceaseless pain, and frequent wanderings of the mind, which still, however, kept in view the heavenly rest to which it was hastening ; for all her delirium was only like a blessed dream, in which she beheld more vividly the wonder and the glory about to be revealed.

I never shall forget the anguish of Emile to see her suffer. It was, no doubt, the means of softening to him the stroke that was so soon to fall ; for he seemed as if he would rather part with her for ever, than see her suffer for an hour. And yet, with all our tenderness, and all our solicitude, we could do nothing to help her. The hand of death was heavy upon her, and it was fearful to see the frail victim quivering in his grasp.

At last there came a calm ; a season of sweet peace. She spoke again in her own familiar tones, and asked to have the window opened, that she might feel the breeze, and see the sun shine in once more. Her pain had ceased. She smiled, and said she felt nothing ; but it was an awful

calm, and Emile and I kept silence, until we could hear the beating of our own hearts. She took our hands in hers, and, fixing upon Emile a look of intense and holy love,—“I am passing away,” she said, “beloved friend of my soul. I know that to you the world will be more desolate when I am gone; but is it not a blessed thought, that when your labours here are ended, I shall be the first to welcome you to our ‘Father’s mansion in the skies?’”

“My poor Flora,” said she, then turning to me, “with all your genius and all your talents, you will be very lonely. But Emile will comfort you. He will be all to you that he would have been to me. Will you not, Emile? Promise me this, before I leave you.”

I felt his hand tremble violently as it touched mine. I looked into his face. A slight convulsion passed across his lips, which were as pale as ashes.

“I will be all to your sister,” said he, “that your husband can be.”

She looked at him again, and smiled; as much as to say, he had evaded her question. She tried to speak, but the tide of life was ebbing, and in a few moments she had ceased to breathe.

After a long and solemn pause, Emile knelt down beside the bed, and poured forth his soul in prayer. We were alone in the world—alone in the presence of the dead—alone in the sight of Heaven. How did I long, in that awful moment, to pour forth my spirit also, through the same channel—how did I long to come, like the prodigal, and to make confession that I was no longer worthy to be called my Father’s child. How was it that I hardened myself at such a time, and allowed the day of visitation to pass by?

It was easy to discover that I was nothing now, or

worse than nothing, to Emile. He was kind, but so distant; as if he thought I should presume upon my sister's dying request. It was a delicate subject to touch upon; for how could I explain to him that I had neither desire nor expectation that he should act upon my sister's wish. Yet I was determined to make the effort; for existence was heavy enough to me, without the burden of this thought.

"Emile," said I, once when we were spending a long dull evening together, "it is absolutely necessary that you and I should perfectly understand each other. Know, then, that I have no more desire than you, that you should act upon the sisterly suggestion of her, whose wish in almost any other case had been my law. I could not have said this to a man of common mind. You, I feel assured, will be able to understand my motives, and the price at which I would purchase your peace and mine. Besides, you are the only friend now left to me in the whole world, and I cannot afford to lose you for a scruple of delicacy. Do not, then, be afraid to be to me all that common kindness would dictate. Do not regard the inferences which may be drawn. As my father's friend, and my sister's husband, you owe me some consideration, and I have a right to claim it. As I said before, I have not another friend in the world. Do not forsake me because others have kindly wished for you and for me what we have never wished for ourselves."

Emile held out his hand. He even pressed a brother's kiss upon my forehead.

"Thank you, Flora," said he. "Thank you a thousand times. I am neither so vain nor so presumptuous, as to suppose that I could ever be to you what I have been to another; but I own I did fear that my attentions might

have been misconstrued; and that you might, consequently, have been reduced to the painful necessity of treating me with coldness. I therefore determined that the pain and the coldness should both be mine; but it seems I was mistaken in my calculations, and that I should have been more delicate, had I been more kind."

The day of my sister's funeral had been one of more than common sadness. Emile and I had walked together to the grave. We were the only mourners. The grass had scarcely grown over the turf where my father was laid, when another white tablet was placed within the same enclosure, which seemed already widening with a cold welcome for me.

All things had been arranged by Emile with the greatest consideration for my feelings. There was one shock, however, which he could not avert; and it became his painful duty to tell me, that I must leave the parsonage house; the home where I had first been sensible of kindness; where my sister Lillah and I had played together in our childhood.

It had been entirely owing to the delicacy and solicitude of Emile, and to his representations of my sister's illness, that we had been allowed to remain there so long. But as there was no farther plea for my continuance, and the clergyman who succeeded my father had politely expressed his desire to take possession, I necessarily prepared for a task, which seemed at the time to me more difficult than any of the melancholy duties I had lately been called to perform.

I was left with a very slender income; yet my wants were also proportionately small; for I was alone—alone, without being bound by the ties of relationship or affection to any being upon earth, except one.

Emile was particularly anxious to consult my choice, as to the place of my future residence. Of course I preferred remaining in my native village, for where else could I go? The poor people here, I thought, will be kind to me, for the sake of former services; and every Sunday I shall hear him preach; and, perhaps, that will do me good.

There was one house in the village which seemed exactly suited to my circumstances, and only one. It had been lately built; was of red brick; and perfectly square; standing near the public road, from which it was separated by a row of white paling, and a little space of what the owner called garden ground, containing a bush of rosemary, a wall-flower, and some coarse grass. The house was entered by three plain stone steps, exactly the width of the door, which was green, and narrow, and level with the wall. The passage, was narrow too, and straight through the house, opening at the other end by a similar door, into a continuation of the same enclosure, still called a garden, and at that time planted with potatoes. On each side of the narrow passage, were doors exactly opposite each other, leading into two square parlours, exactly alike, with the recesses beside the fire-places, filled up with cupboards, that were painted a bluish white. It was advertised as a convenient and elegant residence, and ranked next to the parsonage house, and the mansion of the squire.

I ought to have been satisfied; and yet, when I first went with Emile to see it, I felt so sick at heart, that I sat down, and burst into tears.

He continued kindly repeating, that furniture made all the difference—that my harp could stand here; my sofa there—that this was a good light for painting, and

that would be a snug corner for a winter's evening ; and yet, with all his benevolent efforts, he could not reconcile me to my fate.

"It is of no consequence," said I at last. "It is but like the whole of my future life. The house is good enough for me. I only wish it was a grave."

Emile took up my words. He spoke to me kindly as a Christian friend ought to speak. He thought it was nothing but the natural grief of a daughter, and a sister, that weighed upon my soul. He did not then know the total estrangement of that soul from all the sources of consolation, by which he was sustained.

The day arrived on which I must actually take leave of the parsonage, as my home, for ever. Emile had busied himself, even with the arrangement of my furniture, so anxious was he to spare me any painful effort, and to make my new abode look capable of cheerfulness, and comfort ; and I began almost to think, that when the curtains were let down, and a cheerful fire was blazing, the little parlour might not be altogether horrible ; but of course, this could only be when he came to spend his evenings with me, as I doubted not he often would.

The day arrived when I was to leave the keys of all the doors of the parsonage behind me ; to look my last into my father's study ; and to tread, for the last time in my life, along the passage to his chamber, where it seemed to me, that I still heard the light step of my sister Lillah.

If I were to study how to picture in one scene, all that imagination conjures up, and all that heart-warm recollections embody in our national word—home, it would be a representation of that old parsonage, within and without ; its carved oak, its deep recesses, its wide bow-windows, embowered in wreathing plants ; and then the garden,





LOOKING TOWARDS MY HOME, AND KNOWING I NEVER MORE SHOULD CALL IT MINE.



with the beds of flowers that my father and Lillah loved so much ; the green walk behind the yew-trees, leading to the church ; the old steeple, clothed with ivy, gleaming out amongst the elms ; and the path to the porch, on which my father never would allow a weed to grow—all enclosed together, like a bower of beauty, and shut in from the public road by a neatly-clipped hedge, through which the same gate, open ever to the needy and the poor, led both to the church and to the pastor's door. Oh, was it not a scene to wring the heart of a lonely wretch like me, as I stood outside this gate, leaning my arm upon it, looking towards my home, and knowing that I never more should call it mine !

I wished at that moment that I had chosen another land, another nation, for my residence. But then, how should I have seen Emile ?—and to dwell near him ; to see him every day ; to hear him speak to me ; to know when he was ill, or if anything affected him in mind or body—were the only things that reconciled me to life.

My servant, who waited for me, and who held beneath her arm her own little store of worldly wealth, awoke me from my long reverie, by observing, in the language of her own simple thoughts, that we were leaving the door of the new house a long time open, and that perhaps some idle persons might be tempted to go in.

Happy girl ! How I envied the heart that had nothing to trouble its repose, but the safety of another person's household goods.

Emile was standing at the door of my new house, smiling the kindest welcome as I approached. It was a cold day, and he had ready for me a cheerful fire, which he stirred with great energy, after he had drawn for me my favourite chair beside it.

"Here is not exactly the same aspect of things," said he, "as we find at the parsonage; but here is all that is necessary to make a Christian contented; and you, Flora, I am sure, will not wish for more."

I answered with a heavy sigh; for I felt that the contentment of a Christian was not mine to feel.

It was a peculiar feature in the character of Emile, that he spoke rarely, and with apparent difficulty, of his own feelings. He seemed to live for others, not for himself; and thus, though his loss had been so much heavier than mine, he never alluded to his own personal affliction; but assumed a constant cheerfulness of manner, in the hope of imparting it to me.

"I must now tell you," he said, "in plain terms, that I am promising myself the pleasure of spending a long evening with you, if you will allow me to be your guest. I set off on my journey for Cambridge to night. A chaise will come for me at ten, and I hope to meet the mail at eleven."

I had started too evidently at this intelligence, and I endeavoured to conceal my emotion, by asking, in a tone of assumed indifference, if he expected to stay long at Cambridge.

"I am unable to say," he replied, "how long. It will depend upon how and when my future lot is fixed. As soon as I learned that Mr. B—— intended taking the whole duty of this parish himself, I made application in two quarters, and at present I have nothing to do but to wait patiently until the line of duty is pointed out to me."

"Then you leave this place entirely?" said I, the words absolutely choking me as I uttered them.

"Entirely," he replied, "except that I hope sometimes to visit the friends I leave behind. And, Flora, you will

write to me often, will you not ? and tell me all about the schools, and the work-house, and the poor old people ? ”

What else he said, I cannot tell. I felt a coldness, like death, stealing over me. In another moment I should have lost the power to escape, and my secret might have been betrayed. Fortunately, I started up, and, rushing into my own chamber, gave way to such a violent burst of grief, that my servant came to my assistance. She had lately become expert in administering my favourite remedies, and now entreated that I would take something to support my strength, for that I had had nothing that day.

She brought me my accustomed medicine. It seemed to produce no effect. I took a double quantity, and soon began to feel as if I could bear to look the fact in the face, that Emile was really going to leave me.

My servant carried down a report that I was ill. Emile was alarmed. He sent up many messages of inquiry, and offers of assistance. I should have gone down earlier, but that on turning towards the glass, I saw my face all flushed and heated, and looking anything but ill. I could not, however, for this reason, afford to lose the last evening I might possibly ever spend in the society of Emile.

He met me on the stairs, with a look of the most anxious solicitude.

“ It is all over,” said I, “ it was a mere nothing—only a sort of faintness I am subject to.”

I would gladly have changed the subject ; but he stood beside my chair, hung over me, and looked into my face, with an expression of the deepest concern.

“ And what do you take for this faintness, Flora ? ” said he.

“ Why, to-day,” I answered—“ I have taken—my servant brought me a small quantity of brandy. I was

almost insensible at the time, and should probably have taken anything else that she might have offered to me."

"Brandy," said he very gravely, "is a dangerous medicine."

"I take so very little," said I, endeavouring to smile off the subject, and at the same time blushing deeply,—  
"I take so very little, and really I don't know what else would do me good. Can you tell me?"

"I am not much skilled in medicine; yet thus far I dare go; and I repeat, "that brandy is a dangerous medicine for you. I will not deny that there are cases where it may do good to the body, if it does not endanger the mind. But do not trust yourself to it, Flora; it is worse than poison to you."

"What can you mean, Emile? Do you think I am addicted to intemperance?"

"Far, far from you and me be such a thought!"

"Then what can you mean?"

"I mean, Flora, that your character as well as your circumstances are peculiar. I mean, that you are one whose talents must be employed, whose conscience must be satisfied, and whose affections must have an object; and that you never can know happiness without one or all of these. Yet it has pleased God, as if, for your especial trial, so to place you for the present, that you will have no regular occupations to demand your attention, no relative duties to call you out of yourself, and no object to love.

"Spare me, Emile! in mercy spare me! I knew the horrors of my fate before. Why will you place them before me in this new and hideous form?"

"Think not, dear Flora, that I would willingly exaggerate, what you call the horrors of your situation. Far

happier to me would be the task of making the duties which still await you, more attractive than they are. Permit me, however, as a Christian friend, to be faithful to you. Permit me to feel as if you were in reality my sister."

"Then when you speak of duties, Emile, you must tell me, as a friend, what you think mine are; for I have looked around, but it appears to me that I have no place in society—no business on the earth—and"—I would have added, but feared to shock his feelings by an exposure of the real state of mine—"no claim to an inheritance in heaven."

"You grieve me to the heart," said he, "when you talk in this melancholy strain, so unworthy of your principles, and of yourself. I entreat you, Flora, to shake off these morbid miseries, and to be again your better self."

"Never! I shall never be again what I was!"

"You will never, it is true, be again the cherished daughter of a proud and happy parent; but there is still between your heavenly Father and yourself, the same relation as before, the same account of responsibilities to render, the same covenant to fulfil. It is not with you, as with many others, who have simply been born within the pale of Christian fellowship. You have publicly acknowledged, and in some respects acted upon, a more especial call to honour your Saviour's name. Your talents, your genius, all increase your influence; and your influence increases your responsibility."

"You forget, Emile, that there is no one now left for me to influence, either for good or evil."

"No, Flora, it would not be easy for me to forget, that you have now no one to cherish with your love, no one to look up to you with partial admiration, no one to be

cheered by your coming in, or saddened by your going out, no one to receive from you the kind offices of sisterly affection. I must forget my own existence, before I can forget this. In speaking of your responsibilities, I meant only, that you were still capable of contributing to the happiness of others."

"And how should that be possible, when no one loves me well enough to care what I say or do?"

"Not, as I said before, to contribute to their happiness through the channel of your affections, or of theirs, but by making them familiar with the truths of the gospel, and increasing their acquaintance with the only true wisdom.

"Look at your situation, Flora, and at the situation of those around you; and you will surely cease to ask, where are your responsibilities? You have time, which few of them enjoy; talents, which they none of them possess; and attainments, far beyond their reach. Every one who is inferior to yourself, has some claim upon you; for why have you been so highly gifted, but to render your gifts conducive to the general good?"

"Ah! Emile, it is easy for you, who have always been so devoted, to practise what you preach."

"Is it easy for me, Flora? Is it easy for me to go through the same routine of duty, as I did, before the decree went forth against me. 'Behold, I will take away the desire of thine eyes.' Yet I will not complain; for I have lived through what I should once have thought myself incapable of enduring, and never could have sustained by my own unassisted power."

Emile then changed the conversation, for this was a subject on which he never allowed himself to dwell in words, whatever he might do in thought.

“I am anxious to know,” he said, “whether the clergyman who now takes charge of this parish, will pay any attention to the schools. Whether he does or not, however, they are in excellent order; and with your superintendence, I have no fear that they will fall away. I have made out a list of the poor people whom I should like to commend especially to your care. I am sure you will visit them often, both for their sakes and mine.”

He then described to me the circumstances of each—young and old—feeble and strong; and I appeared to listen; but I was in reality counting the strokes of the village clock, which seemed that night to strike the hours almost as rapidly as minutes.

“You surely do not hear the chaise,” said he, taking out his watch, and seeing it was only nine, “we have one hour yet,” he added, “let us spend it in commending each other to our heavenly Father. Let us part, as those ought to part, who have lately shared such solemn scenes as we have witnessed together.”

We knelt together as we had often done before, beneath my father’s roof, and with him it seemed as if his whole heart was poured into his prayer—as if he cast himself, wholly and without reserve, upon the mercy he implored; and consequently feared nothing, and felt nothing, but submission, and trust, and holy peace.

The burden of his spirit, however, that night was for me; and if the prayer of another could have saved me, I should have been snatched from the precipice on which I stood.

For myself, I joined not with that prayer, even in the secret of my heart. It seemed to me as if the heavens were as brass. And this solemn act of worship was ended, and I was spiritually unmoved. A sudden thought then

came over me, that I would tell him all—all my sinfulness, and my estrangement from God; and perhaps he could help me. My heart began to beat violently, and the words were already on my lips, when the approaching sound of a carriage warned me that the season of visitation had again passed over, and that I was to be left to myself.

Emile took leave of me with a degree of brotherly affection which surpassed my expectations. I received it, I believe, without any suitable return, for I neither saw, nor heard, nor felt distinctly, until the door was closed, and the carriage had rolled away—and then came the tide of feeling like a flood.

The light of morning gleaming through my lattice, found me in the same position I had assumed, when, after straining every nerve to listen if I could hear no longer any sound like carriage-wheels, I had sunk into my solitary chair before the fire. The light of morning found me with my feet upon the fender, and the white ashes lying cold upon the hearth.



## CHAP. V.

## CONFESSIONS OF A MANIAC.

THAT portion of human existence, which appears the most lengthened in endurance, usually occupies in description the shortest space.

It would be impossible for me to say, how days, weeks, and months passed over me, after I was, in every sense of the words, left to myself. I remember nothing distinctly but the evenings—and they were all alike. I might say, in the words of the poet,

“Endless, and all alike;”

for when a day of intolerable length was drawing to its close, and my servant and her happy neighbours thought it all too short, I knew that I had to summon fresh resolution for the lapse of time which still remained, before I could forget myself in sleep.

You will wonder what had become of my benevolence, and my active usefulness, when I tell you that I had no pursuits. Originating as they had done in an entire misunderstanding of my own motives and principles, it was impossible, after attaining a true knowledge of these, to carry them on as I had done before; and having once withdrawn myself from the sphere of action in which I took so conspicuous a part, I felt ashamed to enter upon it again in a manner less creditable or influential.

Thus I had no occupation: with books I had lost my companionship, for they awakened thoughts I was too anxious to forget; and as for music, it was a perfect

torture to me ; for there was no tone, even of my own voice, nor melody, nor chord, that did not bring back to me the sweet and pleasant past, the old parsonage, my father, and my sister Lillah, and Emile ; but, more than all, my own innocence and peace. Then followed the picture of what I had become—my loneliness—my separation from all things pure and holy—my wretchedness on earth, and my unfitness for heaven.

These were the thoughts that used to flow into my heart like a flood, evening after evening, as I sat alone, after the last sounds of the village had ceased, when the lights had vanished from the cottage windows, and the watch-dog had bayed himself to rest. It was then that I used to long for a distant storm to come booming over the billows, and roaring through the old trees which skirted the church-yard—that I longed for any thing, in short, to break the leaden stillness that closed around me like a tomb. And yet hour after hour passed away, and there was neither wave, nor throb, in that great world of space, of which I seemed to be the only occupant—the centre and the soul.

Need I say, that the habit I had contracted of drowning myself in forgetfulness, grew upon me daily, and was confirmed by the lengthened weariness of every night. In vain did I resolve, when morning came, that I would break through the bondage it was imposing upon me. Midnight again found me sleepless, unnerved, and miserable ; while, secure that no eye beheld me, I poured out again the fatal draught, and again sank into a feverish and unrefreshing sleep.

During this melancholy season of my life, the only occupation which afforded me any interest, was corresponding with Emile. His letters were brotherly and

kind ; and, although they related chiefly to the poor people of the village, over whom he thought I still exercised a charitable care, they certainly stirred me up to a little improvement in my way of life, by affording me a motive for visiting my suffering neighbours, in order that I might give some account of them in return.

The time of the year was now approaching when I had lost my sister Lillah ; and as the season came again, all things awakened in my mind a deeper sense of the sad changes I had experienced since then. Emile had found a living in a distant county, and though he sometimes spoke of visiting our village again, it was evident he thought with as much pleasure of seeing any of the paupers of the parish, as of seeing me. However, it was something to look forward to ; and even had the event been trifling in itself, it was all my future had in store for me to hope, or dream of.

At last he fixed a time, though not a day. He was to come during one particular week, but he did not say exactly when ; and the week passed over, and he came not, and my nerves were then in such a state, that I could ill bear suspense. I had waited until tidings came that the mail had arrived at a neighbouring town without passengers, when a fit of desperation seized me, and I swallowed more than my accustomed draught.

What followed I can but indistinctly recollect—a well-known step along my garden—a knock that could not be mistaken, at my door—a fluttering thrill of joy and fear, with an utter inability to maintain the balance between both. It was Emile, who had come to visit me in my loneliness—to speak to me again in the kind sweet tones of former days—to sit beside my evening fire, and to

make me feel, had I been capable of such a feeling, that I was not quite an outcast.

I have said that I could not recollect what followed ; but I can recollect too well, strange fits of laughter seizing me, while Emile was as strangely grave ; mistakes which I had the sense to perceive, though not the sense to prevent ; and all the while a burning crimson in my face, for which I many times attempted to apologize, without once being provided with an excuse. Above all, I recollect, that, early in the evening, Emile, after looking at me steadily for some time, rose hastily, and bade me good night, without telling me when he should return, or even whether he should return at all.

The next morning I found a letter on my breakfast table, and taking it up, beheld his hand-writing. Was he then gone ? I tore it open, and read as follows :

“ It can scarcely be possible I should have to remind you, Flora, that yesterday was the anniversary of that on which we followed the remains of your sister to the grave. The season of the year—your own natural feelings of affection—all things must have brought it to your remembrance. Friday, you will remember also, was the day of her death. It was spent by me in solemn fasting and prayer. I had proposed to occupy the day of her funeral in the same manner, but it occurred to me that something was due to the feelings of a sister, and that it might possibly be more profitable to us both, to pray together—to retrace together the events of the past year, to measure our present standing together, by comparing what we are now, with what we were then, and to resolve together, if necessary, that we would begin a new life, letting the

pledge of our sincerity be the vows we should make on the evening of that memorable day.

“Such were my feelings, and such my intentions, when I sought your habitation, and found you—I will not, I dare not, say how. Perhaps you had been weeping. Perhaps I broke upon your solitude too suddenly. I confess my fault; and am ready to hear and to believe any excuse you may offer me, even the most improbable, only let it be the truth. I was not formed for suspicion. I must know the truth. Either put me out of the torture of suspecting you, or tell me the worst.”

I had awoke that morning from a dull heavy sleep, with a dim consciousness that something was wrong—that some calamity was hanging over me, and that I needed more than common resolution to meet the events of the coming day. These feelings, however, had become so familiar to my waking moments, that I endeavoured to drive them away, by persuading myself again and again, that my situation on the past evening, could be known to none but myself; that Emile had only left me on some call of duty, and would come again when I should be better able to converse with him, and to enter into his feelings. What then was my alarm and horror, when I found myself called upon in this solemn manner to reveal the actual truth.

Emile was a man whom no one could deceive, when his suspicions were once awakened; though his confidence, before it had been shaken, would carry him to almost any extent of credulity. What then remained for me to do? My resolution was quickly taken. I confessed the whole.

“I am indeed fallen low,” I said in the conclusion of my letter, “when I implore you to come to me, though I

know it must be with loathing—when I beseech you not to forsake me, but to bear with me, and to help me; for I believe I have lost the power to help myself.”

In the course of half an hour Emile was at my door. He did not take my hand, nor look in my face, nor address me in the common language of salutation. I could see that he was trembling all over, and I trembled too. He spoke directly to the point, for we were both occupied with one thought, and it would have been useless to touch on any other. Although the subject was one of the most gross and repulsive it was possible to contemplate, he addressed me in language as delicate, as it was beautiful and impressive; inspiring me for the moment with something like hope, that perhaps I might yet be restored to the fellowship of the virtuous, and the favour of God. Nor would he leave me until he had laid down plans for my protection for the future.

“Send away,” said he, “every drop of this poison, not only from your closet, but from your premises. Let the cravings of midnight solitude find you unprovided with supply. Let the conviction that no eye sees you, come upon you without the means of gratification. We must take care to set a guard upon the body, as well as upon the mind. You will write to me at stated intervals, under the solemn vow you have already made, to reveal to me the truth. And remember this—that your rule must be broken by no plea of illness, of advice of doctors, or of persuasion and example of friends; for what is medicine to others, is poison to you; and it is better, infinitely better, to lose the body than the soul. Above all, keep this in mind, that victory over your besetting sin can only be obtained by watchfulness and prayer. Not by watchfulness at one time, and prayer at another; for when you

watch you must pray, and when you pray you must not cease to watch.

"And now," said he in conclusion, while the tears stood in his eyes, "my poor Fora! you and I must part again; for there can be neither peace nor comfort in our intercourse, until some change is wrought."

He took my hand, and solemnly bid me farewell; but did not, as on former occasions, leave me with a brother's kiss. I stood motionless, and speechless, until the door closed after him; and I was left again to feel that I was utterly alone. For the past I had now nothing but repentance: for the future, Emile had told me there was hope. As I had been perfectly sincere in the confessions I had made to him, I was also sincere in the vows by which I had bound myself to fulfil, to the utmost of my power, the injunctions he had laid upon me; and I commenced, without delay, putting in execution the plan he had proposed for securing me against temptation.

There are, however, two ways of following out a resolution; and of one of these, it is important to observe, that it seldom fails to prove fatal in its results. There is a resolution, under which we act promptly, and without reserve, as if in the sight of God, as well as man; and this resolution God seldom fails to bless. Mine, I need hardly say, was of a character essentially different. It was my desire, as well as my determination, to give up the dreadful practice to which I had become habituated; and, secure in the rectitude of my intentions, as well as the strength of my will, I indulged that very evening to the extent of my wishes, secure that it would be the last time; for the morrow was the day I had fixed for depriving myself entirely and for ever of the means.

The morrow, however, brought its difficulties. I had

promised Emile to send away every dangerous kind of stimulant which I had in my possession ; but how and where to send it, was a question not easily answered. Besides which, I found on examination there was so little left—so much less than I had expected—that it seemed scarcely worth while taking any pains to get rid of it. If it was dangerous to me, it could scarcely be right to give it to another, lest it should prove a means of temptation. It was allowed to be an useful medicine in illness ; so I decided at last, to keep it under lock and key, for the purpose of distribution amongst the poor, in their necessities. This was my resolution.

For many weeks after this, I certainly did abstain scrupulously, if not cheerfully, from all improper stimulus. I did this, however, with a murmuring spirit, feeling all the while, as if I ought to have been rewarded with more peace and more satisfaction, for the self-denial I was practising. Emile wrote to me at stated intervals, and my only moment of enjoyment, was that in which I proudly and clearly answered to his inquiries, ‘Not guilty.’

My hour of trial, however, was not yet fully come. I was seized with a painful kind of indisposition, which kept me wakeful all the night, and weary all the day. My servant, and the gossips of the place, all agreed in recommending brandy. I thought my case a hard one, for I knew that every one around me—rich and poor, good and evil—would take stimulants for such a malady ; and it seemed to me, that I alone was condemned, by cruel necessity, to suffer without hope of relief.

I was in this state of mind one day, when my servant brought me a glass of strong brandy and water. I could have resisted the sight, but the smell overcame me, and I swallowed it without a moment’s hesitation.



The rubicon being now passed, I scrupled not to take more and more, calling it a medicine, and justifying myself by the idea, that neither Emile, nor any one else, would, in common kindness, wish me to abstain from a useful medicine, that was free to all mankind ; especially as I determined afresh, each time the draught was renewed, that it should cease the moment I was restored to health. In this I felt so secure, that I began by degrees to regard my present deviations from the line of conduct laid down by Emile, as a series of distinct and separate acts, having nothing whatever to do with the promise I had made him, which promise, I still determined, as soon as relief from pain should be obtained, to keep inviolate as ever.

I could not, however, subdue all feeling of uneasiness, as the time approached when I was to render my periodical account to my last and only friend. It was true, I had long been the slave of one particular vice. To the upbraidings of conscience, on one particular subject, I had long been accustomed ; but with deliberate falsehood my lips had hitherto been unstained, and I was some time before I could bring myself to write the guilty word.

After a thousand excuses, however, and a thousand imaginary palliations, the deed was done ; and though I felt as if by that single movement of my pen, I was sealing my sentence for eternity, shutting myself out from hope here and hereafter, and placing an immoveable barrier between myself and all things pure, and peaceful, and holy ; the thought that no eye beheld me, still operated as my transient and fatal security. It was in appearance but a trifling act, and soon done ; yet being premeditated, and unrepented of, where was my guarantee that it should not be repeated ?

It is my firm conviction, that one sin deliberately com-

mitted, and wilfully persisted in, has the power to harden the conscience, and blacken the soul, as effectually as if the calendar of guilt was filled up with every crime under heaven. Such at least was the consequence to me.

A falsehood once told, is easily repeated. It seemed to me but little exaggeration of my culpability to tell Emile, from time to time, that I was not guilty; and I had all the while so many ailments both of body and mind, that the grounds on which I had resumed my fatal habit, grew stronger than ever.

Still I lived constantly in a state of irksome restraint, taking much less than formerly, and thus enjoying neither the reward of self-denial, nor the grosser satisfaction of entire indulgence. Emile was all the while writing more and more kindly to me, touching less and less upon the one hateful theme; until at last, he ceased to mention it altogether, believing, no doubt, there was no longer any necessity for wounding my feelings on such a point.

Two years had passed away in this manner, when I was surprised one day by a letter from my only friend, in which he proposed paying me another visit; and on examination of the date, I found he would be with me on the following day. For the first time in my life, I felt no pleasure at the prospect of seeing him; for what could his presence bring to me but conviction and shame.

On his arrival, I could see at once that he was more cheerful than usual, and his first words of kindness smote me to the soul. He watched me attentively, and looked earnestly in my face; and I thought I could discover something like disappointment, that I was not able to meet his searching glance with a steady look in return.

Never before in my life had I felt so utterly degraded. More than once I had nearly yielded to a sudden impulse

to cast myself at his feet, to make confession of my guilt, and to ask his forgiveness once more. Had I been really desirous of forsaking the evil of my ways, I should unquestionably have done this ; but, alas ! there remained at the bottom of my heart, notwithstanding all the seasons of suffering and humiliation through which I had passed, an unshaken determination still to defy my God—still to shut myself out from his mercy then, and for ever.

It would have answered no good purpose, therefore, had I made confession to Emile. And, regarding it as an unnecessary exposure, too painful both for him and for me, I acted my part with tolerable composure, though not without being afresh convinced, of

“ What a tangled web we weave  
When first we practise to deceive.”

For the questions he put to me, and the false footing on which I had dared to place myself in his esteem, all tended to plunge me deeper and deeper in falsehood ; until, when I retired to rest that night, I felt as if earth held not on her bosom a guiltier wretch than I.

In vain I tried to sleep. Spectres of every horrible shape surrounded my pillow, and if I sank for a moment into forgetfulness of the present, it was only to be carried back to more vivid recollections of the past—of my father's house—of the days when I was the joy of his proud heart—of my sister, and our innocent and happy childhood—of all that I might have been to Emile, and he to me ; and then to awake to a fresh conviction of what I really was.

In the morning Emile came again. He took a kind and lively interest in all that he regarded as connected with my happiness. He examined my books, arranged

them afresh, and appeared surprised and grieved that I could not speak with pleasure of anything I had been reading, or doing.

"Flora," said he, "you are not candid—you are not confiding as you used to be, and as I hoped you still would be to me. I fear there is some estrangement on your part—that I have assumed too much the privilege of early friendship, or that you no longer wish your happiness or misery to be in any way connected with me. I am the more sorry for this apparent estrangement, because this is the time I had fixed in my own mind for proposing to you that we should both hold in remembrance the last request of your sainted sister. I pretend to no second love; but for the sake of your father, and of Lillah—for the sake of the memory of the past, as well as for your own virtues—I would rather share my home with you, than with any other woman. It is true it may not be yet; but I am distressed to think of your loneliness; and I want you to feel that there is a home awaiting you, not destitute of comfort; and a friend whose proudest wish on earth would be to make you happy."

And I heard all this, like one who sits in darkness, while the lightning flashes before his eyes. Heaven seemed to be opening before me—far, far away; while hell yawned beneath. I answered not. How could I answer? And he went on so kindly, urging upon me, what I knew too well—that loneliness was not good either for man or woman; that if I lived with him, I should have many pleasant duties, to lead me out of myself; and that if the spirits of the blessed could know the events which transpire on earth, the friends we had loved and lost, would smile upon our union.

This conversation was interrupted by a loud knock at

my door. At first I felt it a relief, and hoping some necessary occupation would call me out of the room, I awaited the entrance of my servant, who was a country girl, and had not lived with me many days.

Her message came sufficiently soon. She threw open the door of the sitting-room, and said, in a voice particularly audible and distinct, "Here is a boy from the wine merchant's, who says he has brought the brandy that was ordered."

I looked at Emile, for I was in a state of frenzy. His face was flushed with indignation; but he spoke not until the whole affair was arranged, and the door was again closed. He then rose, and fixing his eyes upon me, "Flora," he said, "you are a guilty, a despicable woman. The vice of which I warned you was one to claim my deepest pity, because I believed circumstances rather than inclination, had brought it upon you. I was prepared to learn that you had fallen a victim to it again and again, for I know its insidious nature. I was prepared to bear with you, to struggle with you, to pray with you; and, provided you overcame it, as I believed you had done, I was prepared to live with you and love you: so deep was my sympathy with you, so dear my remembrance of the past, with which you alone were connected. I was prepared for all this, Flora, but I was not prepared for being deceived. I was prepared for all this; but it had never entered into my calculations that it was possible for you to stain your high character with falsehood."

He paused, but again resumed in a tone more sad and less severe.

"Every link is now broken, Flora, between you and me, except that of common kindness, and, I trust, of Christian charity. I will serve you still if you desire it,

in any way that remains in my power ; but you and I must dwell apart. God alone can be your help and comfort now. To his care I leave you. To his care I will not cease to commend you in my prayers. Farewell, farewell, my poor lost Flora. I must not stay to pity you."

There is a long season of my life after this time, which I find it impossible distinctly to remember. When I look into it, it appears like a gulf of darkness, in which spectral forms are flitting. I believe I must have sunk deeper and deeper into humiliation and despair ; for I have an impression on my mind, that the boys of the village used to call after me, and that my servant joined in their laughter. At last, after a long, long while, some one brought me to this place. I suppose it was Emile, for no one else had any right over me, or would have cared to exercise it if they had.

I will tell you but one thing more, for I see you are weary. Every one wearies of me. Emile is married. His wife is an excellent and pious woman, and they live together in a pleasant village far away in the north ; where they have schools and charities, and are followed by the blessings of the poor. And I am here ; and the people around me are howling. Hark !"

And she echoed the sound which had struck upon her ear, by a piercing cry, the prelude of one of those dreadful paroxysms of the disorder to which she was subject, and of which the people of the house had warned me as almost invariably following the recital of her story. For this reason I had hesitated as to whether it was justifiable in me to listen. But they said it made no difference, that she would relate it, when the fit was upon her, even to the walls of her cell ; her fancy conjuring up some imaginary

listener, so that they had frequently opened the door, believing she must have found some strange auditor.

They said that she was at times perfectly sane; so much so, that they had regarded her as not a fit subject for their establishment; and that, under this impression, she had many times been sent away; but on returning to her former habits, her head had again become disordered, and the same good clergyman who watched over her with such anxious care, had brought her back to the institution, with fresh injunctions to treat her with the utmost kindness and respect; to pay every attention to her health; and faithfully to transmit to him every change which might take place in her situation, her habits, or her character.

Within a few minutes after the conclusion of her melancholy story, the poor maniac became incapable of anything like connected thought. Her ravings were then so wild and incoherent, that I could only commit her to the care of her accustomed attendants.

In this situation I left her; more than ever convinced, that every mental malady to which we are constitutionally liable, must necessarily be increased by habits of intemperance; and that the most melancholy ruin this world presents, is that wreck of humanity which is tossed "upon the ocean of excess."

## CHAP. VI.

## SOMERVILLE HALL.

THERE are few things that strike us more, in retracing the course of our past lives, than the changes which have taken place in the situation of the families around us, and in the character and circumstances of the friends of our youth. We never see the effect of such changes so forcibly displayed, as when years of absence have repeatedly separated us from our own home circle; and it might sometimes furnish a subject for retrospection, of no idle or unprofitable nature, to inquire by what moral agency some families have been enabled to rise, while others have fallen in the scale of social influence, and domestic comfort.

With such feelings I would retrace the history of my past life, when, after obtaining an appointment in India, I went into the north of England, to pay a visit to my only sister, who was happily married, and settled at the distance of four miles from Somerville Hall.

Fond of all rural sports, I here amused myself to my heart's content, wishing only it was possible to avoid the visits of the country people, upon whom I looked down from the classic eminence I had recently obtained at college, with no common degree of disdain. In vain my sister told me of this worthy person, and that good family, of singular characters she had met with, and of genius born, and blushing in the shade. It was well for her to be amused and contented with all that surrounded her



where her lot was cast ; but with me the case was widely different, and I saw no reason why I should be more than barely civil to the society I met at her house.

One day, however, she appeared to be enjoying a pre-meditated triumph. The Somervilles of Somerville Hall were expected to dinner, and with the only daughter and heiress of this house, she had contracted a close intimacy.

Of the name of Kate Somerville I had already become weary ; as well as of the history of her wit, her lovers, her music, her riding, her fortune, and her eccentricity ; and I had pictured her to myself an untamed country girl, setting up for a character, proud of her money, flirting with the farmers of the neighbourhood, and queening it, with a kind of vulgar superiority, over every one she met.

On this idea of my sister's friend I had dwelt so long, that the bare mention of her name had become an offence to me ; and yet every one would mention it. The country jockeys talked about her pony, the ladies about her dress, the envious about her oddities, the poor about her benevolence, the scrupulous about her extravagance, the extravagant about her scruples, until I knew not what to make of her ; but instead of the curiosity which such contradictory reports might naturally have excited, I conceived a sort of horror at the idea of encountering a woman of so many pretensions ; and to avoid the long day she was expected to spend at my brother's, I should have betaken myself to the fields until nightfall, had I not been unfortunately confined to the house by a severe cold.

To increase my disgust, other neighbours were expected, so that I was to see this heroine in full play, amongst her humble friends, and admiring satellites. Escape being impossible, I nerved myself for the occasion,

and determined, as my last and only resource, to keep the whole length of the room between myself, and the object of my anticipated dislike.

All the other guests had arrived, and were sitting in country state around the drawing-room, when I heard a loud and not unmusical laugh in the adjoining apartment; and my sister, evidently recognizing a well-known sound, hastened out to welcome her friend. The laugh still continued, as Miss Somerville entered, leaning on the arm of her father, a most respectable-looking gentleman of fifty, with blue coat, white waistcoat, and powdered hair. The lady laughed on, for though she was undergoing the ceremony of being presented to the company, she was all the while telling my sister the history of some droll adventure which had detained them by the way.

"This is absolute rudeness," thought I, as the party advanced towards me; and I consequently condescended to pay no farther regard to my sister's friend, than to notice that she had a profusion of close curling black hair thrown back from a broad clear forehead, and teeth of the most shining whiteness. I afterwards discovered that her eyes were dark and flashing; and though her mouth was rather wide, the bold and beautiful curve of her chin, and the noble line from that to her small classical ear, was such as might have redeemed from vulgarity a countenance more broadly marked than hers.

Miss Somerville was certainly not what I had expected. She was bold, but not vulgar—bold, for she was a spoiled child, and had never known the fear of punishment—bold, for she was a high-minded woman, and had never felt the shame of acting a false part.

Still, I did not like her. She had the manners of one who has been accustomed to be thought droll; and though

in my heart I could not accuse her of affectation, there was an arch curve about her lips, and a triumphal elevation of her marked and meaning eye-brows, that seemed to set me at defiance; so that before I was aware of it, I had assumed the air and tone of one who acts on the defensive. With others she conversed rapidly and fluently; but whenever her opinions and mine came in contact, they were decidedly opposed; and before the evening closed, we were positively rude to each other. On my part, I was piqued that one so young, and a woman, should presume to take the lead in conversation; while she was equally surprised and annoyed, to find a gentleman, and a stranger, insensible to her attractions, and unmoved by her influence.

Once, and once only, I detected myself gazing at her with admiration. She had been talking with an old gentleman, of narrow prejudices, and rigid ways of thinking and judging of the poor; when, forgetting all argument, all reasoning, and all calculation—three things she was rather apt to forget—she burst forth into such an indignant and eloquent appeal to the feelings and sympathies of human nature, that the company became silent, and every eye was fixed upon her. Upon which she appeared suddenly to recollect herself, and, shocked at the prominent part she was taking, as well as at the degree of personal feeling she was exhibiting, a burning crimson rushed into her face, while she bent down her head, silent, and evidently abashed.

“There is some grace in her yet,” thought I, “for she knows how to blush; and from that moment I regarded her with more complacency; while my sister relieved her embarrassment, by immediately proposing music.

Again I was annoyed beyond measure, for I doubted

not this country belle would inflict upon us some old piece of music, with its endless variations and accompaniments, the practice of a whole year of her boarding-school education. I was mistaken in my calculations, however; for Miss Somerville refused to be the first to play; and my sister had to make many journeys round the room, pleading with different ladies before any could be led blushing to the instrument. As usual, when they did come, they came in shoals; and the gentlemen then amused themselves with politics, more to their hearts' content. There were still some of the party not so easily satisfied; and I heard my sister whisper to her friend, "My dear Kate, have pity upon my piano, and put a stop to this discord."

Kate laughed heartily at my sister's dilemma; but rose immediately, and taking her humble place amongst the musical group, waited patiently until two young ladies had finished their well-known company duet; when the party could not do otherwise than make way for one whose pretensions all agreed to be unrivalled, though her style of singing was by no means popular.

I had watched these movements, and prepared my nerves for what I expected would be showing off in the highest style of country execution; in other words, making as much noise as the piano was capable of producing, when my ear was caught by one of the sweetest of Scotch ballads, sung by the clearest and most musical of voices, with such rapid alternations of playfulness and pathos, that it seemed to come as fresh from the heart of the minstrel, as if it had never been played or sung before—a genuine burst of feelings, sung as the wild bird sings on his native tree. I had heard more powerful voices, and listened to performances more elaborate and complete, but it seemed to me that I had never before

listened to such free-born native music ; and when the song was ended, I found I had unconsciously placed myself beside the singer, while most of those who previously composed the musical group, had fallen back into their places, and were forming themselves into little coteries of laughter and of gossip around the room.

Miss Somerville rose from her seat.

"You are not tired," I exclaimed with impatience.

"Oh, no," she answered, "but I see my audience is. My style of music is not popular amongst them. They like their own much better ; and I must not monopolize."

My sister had now moved away to another part of the room ; and I consequently found myself tête-a-tête with the very person I most wished to avoid ; and who, unless she would be always singing to me, would, I believed, be nothing but intolerable. Contrary to my expectations, we fell into a most awkward silence, when suddenly the lady turned to me, and said, with a look of grave concern, "You seem to have a dreadful cold, sir. It must be a sad bore to sit in such a room as this, and hear us all talking of things you don't care about ; with that ringing in the ear, and throbbing in the temples, which a bad cold produces. I know nothing worse to endure ; and in charity to you, I am going to break up the party, by carrying off my father. But, stay one moment."

And she went hastily out of the room, without allowing me time to apologize for my stupidity and rudeness, on the score of that indisposition which she had so kindly noticed. My sister followed her, but soon returned.

"When will these people go away ?" I asked with impatience.

"As soon as Mr. and Miss Somerville order their carriage."

“And why don’t they order it now?”

“Because Miss Somerville is standing by the nursery fire, making you a nostrum for your cold.”

“What an unaccountable creature!” I exclaimed. “Why, I have been positively rude to her.”

“That makes no difference with her,” replied my sister. “She would cure the malady of an enemy, just as willingly as that of a friend.”

“Then there is nothing personal in the matter,” thought I, with a slight touch of disappointment,

In a few days this visit was to be returned; and so much were the effects of my cold alleviated by the means above alluded to, that I felt it would be impossible to make indisposition a plea for absenting myself from the party.

Somerville Hall was built in the old English style. It had a square flat front, with octagonal towers projecting a little at each end; and there were turrets, and recesses, and mullioned windows, and winding passages, and all sorts of things to be long remembered about it; but most of all the ivy. Never have I seen such deep, such rich festoons of ivy, as hung over the arched entrance of the eastern tower. And then there was that old-fashioned plant, with its bright red berries, and short green leaves, and the rambling clematis all about the front; while a white rose climbed up to the window of Kate’s own room, as if to mark the purity and sacredness of that particular spot.

But I forget; for I was a long time before I thought there was any thing sacred connected with her; and especially on the day I allude to, though she had cured my cold, I felt as if I owed her a sort of revenge, because I could not dislike her as I had intended; and I thought

of nothing but how pleasant it would be to bring her down, and humble her.

The avenue of elms through which we drove, did not lead directly to the house, though it commanded a view of it through many openings in the trees ; but when we had approached within a hundred yards, the road turned off into an open sweep, along a lawn of the smoothest turf, sloping down to a bright sparkling river, which watered the adjoining meadows, winding like a silver thread amongst the green tufts of ash, and birch, and willow, that fringed its verdant banks. In approaching nearer to the mansion, we passed along the side of a beautiful shrubbery, whose winding walks were scarcely visible amongst the thickly-grouping lilachs, and laburnums, and the weeping willows, that hung over the road.

On reaching this spot, my sister exclaimed with astonishment at the sight of an enormous mound of earth, which several workmen were engaged in rearing, while beside them stood the master of the house, his attention being so entirely absorbed, that he did not observe our carriage pass. It was then I first learned that this excellent man—for excellent he certainly was in all qualities of the heart—was inveterately addicted to the habit of devoting himself to what are commonly called hobbies ; and having no public pursuits, nor anything, in short, to lead him out of the narrow precincts of his hereditary domain, the restless spirit of invention, so often mistaken for that of improvement, had left its traces on many portions of his estate, where sums of money had been sunk sufficient to have cured a man less enterprising, of the fascinating, but dangerous habit of trying experiments on a large and expensive scale. In one part of his grounds, in particular, though happily remote from

the house, was a ruinous heap of broken earth, interspersed with deep pits, beside which were scattered a few slightly built sheds, unoccupied, and falling to decay. Here Mr. Somerville had once intended to establish a pottery; but the idea of digging for coal soon afterwards presenting itself to his mind, the latter gained the ascendancy; and another part of his estate presented an equally deserted scene, strewn with the vestiges of a project equally futile.

It was strange, as Kate used often to observe, that her father should allow these things to remain—that he should not employ some of his numerous host of labourers to smoothe down the earth, and carry off the rubbish, in order to efface the memory of defeated enterprise. The disease of hobby-riding had, however, the same symptoms and character with him, as with others. The object of the present moment, and the hopes it supplied, so entirely occupied his mind, that he seemed to feel neither the pain of wounded pride, nor that of disappointed effort. To him the future was all; and the past was consequently nothing.

To a superficial observer, Mr. Somerville presented a perfect picture of an amiable, peace-loving country gentleman. And so in fact he was. He had not an unkind thought or feeling towards any human being. But at the same he knew very little what human beings were. On the subject of chemical combinations, and patent machinery, his information was far more extensive, and his attention more easily excited. He would probably have fallen asleep, had any one talked to him of moral principle; and even on the finer distinctions of religious creed and party, he was neither an intelligent, nor a patient listener; although no man could be more strictly moral, as to



general conduct, or more scrupulous in observing the religious forms to which he had been accustomed from his youth. Talk to Mr. Somerville, however, on some of his favourite subjects, tell him of some recent invention in mechanism, or discovery in science, and his eyes were lighted up with animation, his whole frame was instinct with another life, and he became for the instant a new and a different man.

Kate Somerville, tempted as she sometimes was to treat with playful satire her father's little peculiarities, still spoke of them with affectionate tenderness, saying they were so harmless, so droll, and they made him so happy. They had, however, two great disadvantages—they wasted his money; and they rendered him, what otherwise his good feeling could never have allowed him to be, at times excessively tiresome.

On arriving at Somerville Hall on the day alluded to, we saw my sister's friend already on the steps. Regardless of those forms of polished life, which would have detained her in the drawing-room until we entered; she rushed out to meet us, and even clasped my sister's hand at the door of the carriage.

Had a painter wished for a personification of all the ideas we are accustomed to embody in a true English welcome—a welcome entire, and hearty, and undisguised, he would have chosen Kate Somerville at that moment; nay, at any moment of that day, for her looks, her manners, the energy with which she stirred up a closely packed fire, inquired after my cold, and drew the most comfortable chairs into the most comfortable places, made us feel at once, that we were making her happy, and ourselves at the same time. It is a nice art, that of making

people feel glad they have been at the trouble of coming to see you. Kate Somerville understood it well.

"I have invited no one to meet you," she said, "except our good friend the clergyman, for I am a great economist of pleasure, and I wanted to have you all to ourselves."

The clergyman, who was a friendly and intelligent man, at that moment arrived ; and one of the party then inquired, what Mr. Somerville was so busy with in the garden.

"Pray do not ask me," said the daughter, with evident chagrin. "There is something rising higher and higher every day ; but what it is to be, I am at a loss to imagine. Sometimes I have strong suspicions it is to be a volcano ; for you must know chemistry is all the rage with us at present—Mr. Ferguson."

"Is Mr. Ferguson here?" asked the clergyman rather hastily.

"Oh, no," replied Kate, "or I should not have invited you. For though yours is an order which ought especially to live in charity with all men, I strongly suspect you, Mr. Forbes, of hating that man."

"I certainly should not choose Mr. Ferguson for my own private companion ;" replied Mr. Forbes. "But as to hating him, I hope I hate no man."

"Who is Mr. Ferguson?" inquired my brother, "if it be fair to ask. I never heard of him before as being at all intimate here."

"He is a man of gas, and blow-pipes, and steam-pressure," replied Kate, "and my father has conceived a great liking for him, because he is about to take out a patent for some wonderful invention. But really I pay so little attention to these things, that I am unable to tell you

what it is. But here comes my good father, so now we will have dinner ; and I hope none of you will require a patent invention for creating an appetite."

Mr. Somerville welcomed his guests with much of the genuine cordiality of his daughter, though he was a man of few words, except when some of his favourite subjects were introduced. Then indeed the case became a very protracted one ; and my sister knowing by experience the difficulty of treating the good man's constitutional weakness, used to warn us off the dangerous ground with great tact and skill.

"You must not speak of his pleasure grounds," she whispered, as we went into the dining-room ; for though you will have to walk round them before the day is over, the longer you can put off this subject, the shorter your penance will be."

At the head of her father's table Miss Somerville appeared to great advantage. She had lost her mother when a child, and the habit thus acquired of superintending the domestic arrangements of the family, had added, to the many good qualities with which her character was adorned, the peculiar excellence of a thorough knowledge of the practical part of domestic economy, combined with the delicacy and good taste which keeps all display of such knowledge to its proper time and place.

The table at Somerville Hall was covered with what some would call "vulgar plenty," in short, with the best of country fare, and many of the greatest delicacies were of Kate's own making ; for she despised nothing, which, as she used to say in homely phrase, "helped to make people comfortable."

"And you never like to make them uncomfortable?" said I : for her manner was one to invite freedom.

“Don’t you remember,” she replied, “when you were a child, and cried for nothing, your kind nurses used to give you a box on the ear by way of something to cry for? Now I confess, when I see people fastidious, and proud, and dissatisfied with those they cannot understand, it does sometimes tempt me to give them something to dislike.”

Had this remark been made with bitterness, it would probably have closed our acquaintance then and there, for I was perfectly aware of its application; but when I looked at the speaker, she was regarding me with such an animated and playful smile, that I could not choose but forgive her. Besides which, she was helping me to the wing of a chicken; so I was compelled to thank her, whether I felt grateful or not.

It seems a strange anomaly in human nature, that so many worthy people of respectable understanding, should, so far as their own practice is concerned, be unable to distinguish between being agreeable, and being tiresome. Poor Mr. Somerville had not the tact to perceive when the ladies had left the room, and the wine had been many times round the table, and he had fairly entered upon his then pet subject—the art of varying the surface of the earth, so as to produce gentle undulations in gardens and pleasure grounds—that his guests were all sitting uneasily on their chairs, looking out of the window, or exchanging glances with each other; until at last, in order to change the scene, if not the subject, my brother proposed a stroll in the grounds, and we gladly rose from the table; for the dinner-hour at Somerville Hall was the same as in the olden time—so early as to admit of a walk before tea.

On reaching the garden, it was a matter of astonishment to us that the master of the house was not ashamed,

but actually proud, to show us what eight workmen, two carts, and four horses were doing in his grounds, and in what was once the loveliest spot of all. He had imbibed the notion, however, that this particular part was too flat, and in proportion to the great mound we had seen in approaching, were deep hollows, where the water now stood in pools. The flower-beds too, on which Kate, and even her father, had once bestowed so much time and taste, were all scooped out and carried away, or else covered over with the mound of earth, which was to be crowned with a Grecian temple, as the finishing stroke of beauty.

But we were all glad to forget these little absurdities, in a man who could lead us back to his fire-side, with the kind and cordial feelings which seemed ever to be glowing at the heart of Mr. Somerville; though he left it to his daughter to express in a more animated manner, what only could be read in the bland and quiet expression of his cheerful face. Nor was there much to be apprehended from his monopoly of the conversation, when his daughter was present; for she had the art of making the evening pass away so pleasantly, that, contrary to all my calculations, I was really sorry when the time arrived for us to leave the hospitable Hall; and I bade good night to Kate Somerville with a conviction that whatever one's previous impressions might be, it was impossible to dislike her in her own house.

It is true she seemed not always sufficiently gentle, that she was often abrupt, and sometimes pert; but then she was so kindly solicitous for every one's comfort; so forgetful of her own, so quick to perceive every little peculiarity of taste or feeling, and so watchful of every opportunity to afford pleasure to her guests, that the

most polished gentlewoman could not have rivalled her in the art of making every one satisfied with the position he held at her father's fireside.

"What happy evenings we always spend here!" exclaimed my sister, as soon as we were again seated in the carriage, where we had offered Mr. Forbes a place; "Miss Somerville leaves us nothing to wish for, either in her heart, or her home."

"A little more quiet would sometimes be an advantage," said Mr. Langton, settling himself to sleep.

"It is, indeed, a delightful place," observed the clergyman, very gravely; "and Miss Somerville is a delightful girl; yet I own, I never visit the Hall, without feeling that one thing is wanting."

"And pray what is that?" I inquired; not quite satisfied that any one besides myself should enjoy the pleasure of finding fault with Miss Somerville—"and pray what do you find wanting?"

"Religion"—was the startling reply.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Have they really no religion?"

"Do not mistake me," said the clergyman. "They are church-going people, and they have a high standard of moral feeling, which I am not aware that they ever violate."

"And what more would you have? Are we not told 'that the tree is known by its fruit?'"

"In prosperous seasons, my young friend, the tree which has but little root, may possibly produce good fruit. The question is, how long will it continue to do so? It is in seasons of temptation and trial that we see the difference between those who have admired religion at a distance, and those who have made it a matter of personal concern

—between those who have simply a knowledge that they are weak and erring creatures, and those who have felt the necessity of laying hold of the means of salvation.”

“But in a home so peaceful and remote as theirs, they must be out of the reach of temptation, if not of trial.”

“Ah! who shall say into what paradise of earth the serpent may not enter!”

“I think you cannot trace it here.”

“Is not the mere fact of living without any definite purpose or aim, beyond the amusement of the present moment, a proof that we are tempted to the sins of omission at least.”

“But I have heard that Miss Somerville is both industrious and charitable in an eminent degree; and who can accuse her father of living without an object, when improvement is the end he has perpetually in view?”

“I have too much respect for the family,” continued Mr. Forbes, “to speak longer in this strain—that is, to speak *of* them, rather than *to* them, respecting their faults. I will only observe, in connexion with this subject, that few persons are permitted to go on to the end of their lives, in a state of self-deception with regard to their religious foundation. Those who have no belief, and make no profession, too frequently die as they have lived: but a religious professor who wants the vital principle of Christian life, is usually—and I may add, mercifully—brought into some state of trial or temptation, under which he is compelled either to lay hold of the only means of support, or to fall from the false position he has held, and thus exhibit to the world the just consequences of his fatal error. My opinion has always been, that we are too apt to blame the world for leading us astray, and

to think that if we neither see nor hear what is evil amongst others, we shall escape its influence altogether. Alas! how many wretched beings have fled the infected city, and found they had the plague-spot on themselves! How many more have shunned the companionship of men, to feel in the end that they were only fit for that of fallen spirits."

It appeared to me at that time, that the remarks of Mr. Forbes were unreasonably strict, and unkindly severe; for I was young and inexperienced, and had not lived to know that our most dangerous enemies are often found within ourselves.

Mine was a delusion under which thousands, and tens of thousands, labour—that of believing it is sufficient to be kind, and generous, and respectable, and beloved; and that no temptation can reach us, so long as we admire and practise whatsoever is aimable.

Let us look to the end, and see whether the season of trial may not arrive even in old age—whether the tree may not fall before the blast, even when its lofty boughs have blossomed and borne fruit—whether the richly freighted vessel may not be wrecked even on its homeward way, and with the haven full in view.



## CHAP. VII.

## SOMERVILLE HALL.

It made a great breach in our enjoyment of the hospitality of Somerville Hall, when Mr. Ferguson joined us, as he sometimes did that winter. On my first interview with him, I felt surprised that a man so gentlemanly as Mr. Somerville should be able to find pleasure in his society, for he was anything but attractive in his own person. Yet on farther observation I found him possessed of considerable talent; and if not open himself, gifted with the power of unfolding the characters of those around him.

"Will you do me a great kindness," said Kate, one morning when he had been invited to spend the day with us; "will you watch that man for me, and tell me what you think of him? For I cannot make up my mind whether he is rather good, or wholly bad—tolerably respectable, or altogether mean."

"How long have you known him?" I inquired.

"Nearly four months."

"I should certainly say then, that a man who inspires no confidence in an acquaintance of four months, must, at best, be more bad than good."

"Yet he has some redeeming qualities—he listens patiently to my poor father's stories."

It struck me at that moment, that Mr. Ferguson might possibly have his own interest in doing this; but I watched him through the day, and gave my report in the

evening, as I had been requested, without betraying any of the suspicions which were beginning to gain ground in my own mind. My evidence, though confined to subjects of a superficial nature, was far from satisfactory; and, as if by a kind of tacit understanding, we ceased to mention Mr. Ferguson to each other, though his presence had the same effect upon us all; resembling what certain writers have described as operating upon the agents of supernatural power, by that of some being not of their own order.

Much as I now admired Miss Somerville in her father's house, I was not aware of some points of excellence in her still undisciplined character, until one morning, when my sister wished particularly to see her friend, and I was sent, by no means an unwilling ambassador to the Hall, to request that she would ride back with me, and spend the remainder of the day with us.

I found her in the hall on this occasion in close conversation with an old woman of the neighbouring village, whose daughter lay at the point of death; and so entirely was her attention occupied, that she only bowed as I entered, and waved her hand for me to pass into the dining-room. She soon joined me there, with her accustomed welcome, and when I told her the object of my visit, she willingly acceded to my sister's wishes, endeavouring only to stipulate that I should not wait for her, but allow her to ride alone.

"You must not object to this," she added, "on the score of propriety, for it is what I am accustomed to; and though it may appear to you a breach of decorum for a young lady of nineteen to ride alone, you would find it difficult to convince me, that it is not in reality more safe, and more prudent, for a girl, who, like me, has managed

her own affairs from her childhood, to ride a sure-footed pony alone, through a neighbourhood where she is both known and respected, than to be accompanied through highways and byways by a servant with whom she is but little acquainted."

"But a gentleman friend."

"A gentleman friend!" she exclaimed, interrupting me with impatience, "where is he to be found? A motherless girl cannot be too careful how she yields to the delusion of making friends of gentlemen; and if you were not Lucy Langton's brother, and did not dislike me besides, I certainly should not ride with you."

There was no arguing with Kate Somerville on subjects like this. She knew little, and cared less, about the conventional rules of polished life. Whatever point was discussed, she went directly to the question of its good or evil nature; and acting on the same principle—regarding only what she believed to be essentially right or wrong—she necessarily often did what the world would have condemned; and sometimes even acted in a manner, which, however justifiable to herself, might, on a wider scale of influence, have been injurious to the well-being of society.

"Leaving the argument of propriety then," said I, "entirely out of the question, you will surely permit me to ride with you as a personal gratification."

"I must dispute with you again," said she, "for it would be no gratification to any one to ride with me this morning. I am not going to amble over grassy downs, nor simply to enjoy the freshness of the exercise and the air. I am under the necessity of making several calls in the village; and if you ride with me, you will have to wait for me at the cottage doors, with more patience than I imagine you to possess."

"And is that the extent of your second objection?"

"It is said that a woman's true reason comes last; and I believe mine is yet untold. But you shall hear it if you wish, for I am not skilled in concealing the truth."

"By all means. I believe I shall like your last reason better than the first."

"Well then, there is nothing I despise so much as the affectation of what is good. Do you like my reasoning so far?"

"Extremely."

"Now, it so happens that from our position in the country, my father and I have become intimately acquainted with the affairs of all the poor people in the neighbouring village. It was the habit of my mother to associate herself much with the weal and the woe of those around her, and my father has brought me up to do the same."

"And how is it possible," I exclaimed, "that any proof of the active power of such benevolence should operate to your disadvantage?"

"Just because you do not understand me; and if any of these poor people should exhibit their gratitude, as they sometimes do, in a very disproportionate and unreasonable manner, you would look upon it all as a scene got up for the occasion to make me appear in your eyes the 'Lady Bountiful' of the village."

Of course I disclaimed all tendency to such injurious suspicions; but Miss Somerville seemed to have understood the nature of my feelings towards her from the first; and leaving me, as I thought, rather haughtily, to prepare for her ride, I remained in perfect ignorance as to whether my company was really irksome or otherwise.

I had never before that day seen Kate Somerville on

horseback. A black pony of uncommon symmetry was led to the door, and the lady soon appeared in her riding-dress, which became her more than any other. She was indeed the queen of equestrians. The old servant who held her rein, looked proudly at his mistress, then at me, and then at the pony. It had been taught to stand perfectly still, until she was fairly in the saddle, when it bounded from the ground, and danced upon the green sward, in a manner that would have unseated a less skilful rider.

No doubt the lady herself was a little vain of this display ; for when she shook back her glossy ringlets from her brow and cheek, I could see that its colour was heightened ; and while she stretched her hand amongst the animal's flowing mane, and patted its arched and beautiful neck, she looked aside at me with a merry laugh, which told how completely the subject of our late conversation was forgotten in the excitement of that moment.

Miss Somerville looked both so happy and so well on horseback, that it was with feelings of pride as well as pleasure, I accompanied her in her morning's ride, which, however, turned out to be a very different affair from what I had expected, notwithstanding all she had told me of her intentions. No sooner had we reached the village through which our road lay, than I found my patience put to the test by stopping at almost every door. Even at the auberge, or hotel, as it was called, where a red lion swung high in air—even there Kate Somerville reined in her steed, and striking sharply at the door with her riding-whip, desired to speak with the master of the house.

“The girl is possessed,” thought I. “What can she want here?”

"I want to speak with Mr. Giles," said Miss Somerville to the woman who had answered her summons ; and immediately the master himself came forward, and asked if she would be pleased to alight.

"No, no," said Kate, "I only want to speak to you about old Stephenson, the gardener. He has joined the temperance society, and I don't want you to be tempting him to violate his pledge. I see you are laughing at what you think his folly. You can do that as much as you please ; but remember he has been on the brink of ruin, and it is a great thing for an old man like him to begin a new course of life. If, therefore, he falls away again by your persuasion, the sin will lie at your door. So look to it, if you please, Mr. Giles ; for we hear of a good deal that passes in your house."

At the commencement of this conversation, just and praiseworthy as it certainly was, I had felt a strange nervous sensation creep over me, by no means lessened on observing that we were stationed in the most conspicuous part of a populous village, and on a public road, where carriages were every moment liable to pass. It is true, I was myself too much a stranger in the neighbourhood, to run any risk of recognition ; but I was annoyed beyond measure, to be under the necessity of waiting for a young lady engaged in such a conversation, and in such a place. Nor was the spirit of gallantry which inspired me at the commencement of our ride, at all revived by observing the arch smile which played upon the lips of Kate Somerville, as she turned to condole with me on my trying situation. I was even contemplating the possibility of leaving her, as she had originally proposed, when she added, with a total change of look and manner, "You must really have patience with me now ; for this is the

house where the poor young woman is so ill; and I don't know how long I shall be obliged to stay."

"Well, Peggy!" said she to the afflicted mother, who came out to meet her, wiping her eyes with her apron, "You see I am behind my time; but I hope I am not too late."

"Oh! no, Miss;" replied the woman. And she began again her story of often-repeated sorrows; when Kate suddenly turned back to me, and, with a look of serious concern, requested I would leave her, as she felt really grieved to trespass so much on my time.

Had this request been made five minutes earlier, I should certainly have complied; but the tenderness of her manner, when she addressed the old woman, and the entire change her character appeared to have undergone, interested me too deeply; and dismounting, in order to fasten both our horses with greater security, I sat down on a low bench beside the cottage wall.

The humble tenement which the sufferer within was about to exchange for one of still narrower dimensions, was neater, and more respectable, than many in the village. The window of the sick-room, beside which I had unconsciously chosen my seat, was overgrown with ivy; and the casement being thrown open to admit more air into the chamber of death, I found that in the position I had taken, I could not avoid hearing much of what passed within. What, then, was my surprise to find that Kate Somerville could, when the occasion seemed to demand it, speak in tones of the gentlest soothing; while with her own hand she performed many of those tender offices, which the last stage of human suffering demands.

In this work of charity she was disturbed by the feeble

cry of a young child, which seemed to distress her beyond measure; for, drawing the old woman nearer to the window, she said in a whisper loud enough for me to hear, "Why don't you send away the poor baby, just for a few days? It is impossible for you to do your duty both to the mother and the child."

"But where am I to send it, Miss?" said the grandmother. "She pines after it sadly, and I am sure if I was to send it away, the thought of what I had done would disturb her last moments. There, now, she hears it, and points to the cradle; and that is just the little pitiful cry it will keep up till night-fall. If I did but know of anybody that would take it, it would be a great mercy to us all."

"Alice," said Kate, returning to the bed where the poor young woman lay, "will you trust your baby with me for a few days? I will take great care of it."

"Oh! yes, to be sure, Miss," replied a low husky voice, that was scarcely intelligible; "it could not be in better hands."

A convulsive cough then came on, and every moment threatened suffocation; but no sooner was the paroxysm over, than the sufferer sunk again into a heavy sleep; and Kate, taking advantage of the opportunity, hastened to the door, with the infant in her arms.

"Give me something to wrap it in," said she; "a cloak—a shawl—anything will do. There is Jane Butler at the lodge. I am sure she will be kinder to it than any one; and I will bring you tidings of it every day."

"But who is going to take it to her?" asked the old woman; "I dare not trust it to my boy."

"I will tell you who will take it," said Kate Somer-





*"Here now, she hovers and points to the cradle"*



ville, bounding into her saddle, and stretching out her arms for the child—"I will take it myself, for the sooner it is beyond the hearing of its poor mother, the better."

And so there we actually were again upon the high-road, riding back to the hall, and Kate Somerville with the baby in her lap; yet managing so well both that and her horse, that we reached the lodge without a fold of the cloak being displaced, and, probably, without the young traveller itself being aware of any change from its warm cradle in the cottage.

Had I endeavoured, during this part of our ride, to analyze my feelings, I should have found the task impossible; for, notwithstanding the horror it might have occasioned had we met any of my college friends by the way, I doubt whether I did not like Miss Somerville the better for this forgetfulness of self—of appearances—of every thing, in short, but the necessity of the case, and the strong impulse under which she acted.

"There," said she, after placing the child in the hands of Jane Butler, with many charges as to its care and treatment—"there is nothing like transacting one's own business. Had I left it to those old women, they would have consulted about this little affair all day, until the poor mother would have been distracted with their foolish talk. And now we will ride as fast as you please, for Mr. Langton will wonder what has become of us."

It was on this day that my brother first thought it right to warn me against the insidious nature of my growing intimacy with Miss Somerville. Of course I disclaimed all idea, and even all desire, of rendering our acquaintance more than the mere pastime of the moment; yet it was not wholly without some secret satisfaction that I read in his manner, as well as that of my sister, a lurk-

ing desire that it should be cherished into something more than friendship. Still it was no part of my plan of conduct to commit myself by any act or word that could be so construed. I only tried the often-practised experiment of drawing on a correspondence, which, as the time of my departure for India was at hand, I felt as if I had a reasonable plea for proposing. In this, however, my hopes were disappointed; for thoughtless and independent as the behaviour of Miss Somerville in some respects unquestionably was, in others there was a guarded caution, of which no man could take advantage.

“Without a mother,” she said, “and without a friend whom I can consult about the common affairs of life, I have been compelled to lay down rules for my own conduct; and one of these has been, never to enter into a correspondence with a gentleman. I might have said, never to make a friend of one; but I feel, now that you are on the point of leaving us, perhaps for ever, that I shall miss you in our social circle, almost as much as if you had been the friend of many years. I have every thing in the world I desire, except a friend. You will think this strange when your amiable sister is so near me. But a married woman, and a mother, ought to have, and must have, her own little circle of absorbing interest, within which another cannot enter.”

“You will find this friend, most probably, long before I return; when the feeling of friendship will have given place to a happier and closer attachment.”

“Never, while my father lives. As he grows older, he will need me more and more; and perhaps a few years will make me a fitter companion for his old age.”

It was the day of my last visit to Somerville Hall, when this conversation took place. I was mortified on

this occasion to find myself confronted at table by Mr. Ferguson, who took his place on the opposite side with great complacency. I was mortified, too, that I had not succeeded in drawing Miss Somerville into a correspondence; for notwithstanding the prejudice her character and manners had at first excited in my mind, I felt daily and hourly that her society was becoming more essential to my enjoyment. It is true, she was not of the class of women I admired. She was, in fact, of no class. Yet she possessed what so many are deficient in—the power, not only of awakening interest, but of keeping it alive.

As soon as it was possible to leave the table on this occasion, Miss Somerville rose from her seat; and much as I wished to follow her, I was kept back by a feeling of wounded pride, which, however, had its own punishment; for instead of enjoying the last evening I should spend for many years, alone with the woman who of all others interested me most, I sat, as if chained to the table, while the gentleman of the house told long stories about things I neither cared for, nor understood.

For a long time I remained in a sort of stupor, fixed in the same position, filling my glass when the decanter was pushed towards me, and nodding my ready assent whenever Mr. Somerville appealed to me for my opinion. At last the question suddenly flashed across my mind—what can it be that brings Mr. Ferguson here so often, and keeps him here so long? Is it the love of wine? For the lord of the mansion was more than commonly addicted to the old-fashioned hospitality, which presses wine upon a guest. But, no. This was no solution of the enigma; for Mr. Ferguson was a man upon whom wine appeared to produce no effect.

The case was widely different with the good-natured

master of the house ; and I now saw, for the first time, the influence that wine was capable of exerting, both over his appearance and his character. His whole manner, in fact, was changed. His words were no longer cautious and well chosen. He was no longer on his guard against receiving a false impression. But while his dark eyes sparkled with uncommon lustre, and his movements were quick and restless, touch but upon some favourite project, and all the hidden energies of his nature seemed to rise like an uncontrollable flood.

Was it possible that Mr. Ferguson could be playing upon this kind-hearted old man, for his own selfish purposes ; and bending him to his views by this unnatural agency ? My feelings recoiled from such a thought ; yet what sympathy could there be between this cold-blooded unfathomable man, and one whose heart was warmed in no common degree by the kindest feelings of human nature ?

Unable to look steadily at the contrast these two characters presented, or to contemplate the unequal ground upon which they would meet, should the interest of one in any way interfere with that of the other, I rose from the table, and walked out upon the lawn, to enjoy the refreshment of a clear moonlight evening.

The train of my reflections led me back at that moment to the conversation of the clergyman who had regretted the absence of religion in this family ; and I began to perceive that there might be temptations within the most privileged and secluded sphere of human life. "After all," said I, "there must be something in the idea of this good man, there must be something to fall back upon in the hour of trial, something to protect us in the season of temptation."

Such were the vague conclusions which my short and superficial acquaintance with human life at that time produced in my mind. I had seen, in the pleasant home in which I had lately been received almost as a member of the family, a combination of all that we are accustomed to associate with our ideas of earthly happiness—health, and wealth, and freedom from anxiety, with a love of rural occupations, and a situation more than commonly calculated to prolong these blessings.

What then was wanting? Not kind feelings, not cultivated intellect, not time or means for the improvement of every good gift which the hand of a beneficent Creator can bestow. Yet that something must be wanting was evident, for the “serpent sin,” was already entering this garden of Eden, and threatening to poison the peaceful streams by which its flowery paths had hitherto been refreshed.

Here was a proof, then, that it is not from without that our worst enemies assail us. Here the world—as we are accustomed to understand that word—was in a manner excluded. Society brought no contamination here. The theatre of ambitious hope offered no temptation to enlist in its struggles. Pecuniary privations inflicted no wound upon the goaded spirit. Nor was the rivalry of party feeling known within this peaceful home.

Were all its inmates, therefore, necessarily safe? Alas! no. There are traitors within, as well as foes without the camp; and the general who would be sure of his resources, should have a talisman by which to try the heart of every man in his army.

Religion is this talisman. Without its test, there is no safety even where the situation is most secure, where danger appears most distant, and protection most certain.

## CHAP. VIII.

## SOMERVILLE HALL.

PASSING over the seven years I spent in India, as having no connexion with the family whose history I would trace out, I take up my story again at the time when I returned to repair a shattered constitution in my native land.

The letters of my sister during my absence had been too much those of a domestic wife, and affectionate mother, to be occupied at any great length, by affairs that were foreign to her own fireside; and they were, moreover, strongly tinctured with a fault, by no means uncommon in letters that travel far and seldom, for they contained vague allusions to circumstances, which it seemed to be taken for granted by the writer I knew perfectly well, but of which I was in reality as ignorant as if they had transpired in the moon. Thus, whatever had been the state of my feelings on leaving my native country, the darkness in which I was kept for the space of seven years, with regard to the real situation of Kate Somerville, would have been sufficient to quench the knight-errantry of a more ardent admirer than myself; while the different scenes into which I had been plunged, with the failure of my health, and other circumstances of an equally absorbing nature, tended greatly to weaken the impression which her society had made upon my youthful fancy.

Revisiting the same scenes has, however, a powerful effect in calling back the associations with which those



scenes have been connected ; and no sooner had I set foot in England, than my thoughts went back to Kate Somerville ; and I recollected with some complacency, that none of my sister's letters had conveyed the intelligence of her being married.

Having no near relative in England, except my sister ; and the state of my health rendering it desirable that I should enjoy the advantage of easy and cheerful society ; I willingly accepted the invitation of Mr. Langton, to make his house my resting-place for at least some weeks. Late one evening, and weary with my journey, I consequently arrived at his hospitable home, where there was little to remind me of the lapse of time since I had last trod that threshold, except the increased number of little faces, which peeped with much suspicion at the invalid uncle, whom they had so often been charged neither to disturb nor annoy.

Yet, notwithstanding these precautions so kindly meant, there is something which does both disturb and annoy a nervous invalid, in being the object of marked consideration. He likes well enough to have his tastes and feelings consulted ; yet, by a strange perverseness in human nature, is irritated by having the peculiarities of his taste and distaste specified and pointed at. I never felt this more forcibly, than when my sister, in her good nature, described to her young brood, how uncle liked this, and disliked the other ; until my different fancies became like watchwords amongst them, to warn them off from my displeasure, or entitle them to my good will.

Not many days, however, had passed over, before the little rebels had so won upon me, that I could forgive them this, as well as many other heinous faults ; and I had one morning actually gone so far, as to be betrayed

into a reverie upon the desirableness of being married and settled in life myself, when the whole pack burst in upon me, with the intelligence, that Aunt Kate had arrived, and was going to stay the day.

Now, much as I had wished to see my early friend, and many as had been the indirect inquiries I had put to my sister, about things connected with her, rather than about herself; the idea of actually seeing her then, and there, shook my nerves beyond the possibility of giving me pleasure; and I wished from my heart, she had delayed her visit, if only for another day.

There is, in fact, an awful chasm made in every kind of friendship, by an absence of seven years. For two or three, one goes along with the chain of events that happen at a distance. Even four do not absolutely break the silken cord. But seven! — It is beyond all calculation how any one will look and feel after a lapse of seven years; and a meeting under such circumstances, however eagerly it may have been desired, must at first be fraught with a considerable portion of absolute pain.

Besides all this, I had certain tumultuous recollections of Kate Somerville. The picture my imagination retained of her was altogether without repose. It is true, it had charmed my youthful fancy; but sick, and sated with the vivid colouring of an Eastern clime, I had returned with too true a longing for the coolness and the quiet of my native land, to wish for anything that would rouse me from the apathy, into which, from a long continued course of failing health, I was gradually sinking.

With such feelings, it is no wonder that I spent an unusual time at my toilette that day; for besides the reluctance I felt to meet any one beyond our family party, there lurked about my heart a secret desire to make the

best I could of a faded complexion ; and so to arrange my hair, that the few silver threads which already began to glisten about my temples, should not easily be detected.

In these laudable efforts, I know not how far I succeeded ; but I remember, that when the second bell had rung for dinner, I was still undecided which cravat was most becoming, and whether I was invalid enough to go down in my embroidered slippers.

When I first saw Kate Somerville that day, I confess my recollection was at fault. She was stooping down amongst a group of children ; my eye caught only her profile, and I was at a loss to recognize, in the pale, thin, dark woman before me, the laughing girl I had left seven years before. She started up, however, as I approached ; and, advancing towards me, held out her hand in her accustomed cordial manner, when I caught at once the flash of her deep, dark eyes, and the glitter of her white teeth, as she smiled, and spoke with that heart-warm vivacity which I had never found in any other woman.

I have said that seven years make an awful chasm in friendship. They make an awful change in youth and beauty too. I could not tell what had come over Kate Somerville, but her smile died away the moment she had done speaking ; and though she laughed again, once or twice, during dinner, that wild musical laugh that used to vibrate through us all like an electric spark, her countenance became serious almost before the sound had ceased, and one was tempted to ask from what invisible source that voice of mirth had come.

It was impossible to look at the pale, sunken countenance before me, and not feel, that to one of us at least, the experience of the last seven years had been heavily laden. Illness had laid its burden upon my frame ; but

it was too clearly perceptible that her's had been the sickness of the soul, and I felt smitten with grief and shame, that I had not hastened down to offer her the greeting of an old and faithful friend—above all, that I should have bestowed, in connexion with her, a single thought upon the trifles of my toilette.

Kate Somerville had never been solicitous to please by those means in which so many women place the secret of their power—her dress; and in this respect she seemed now to have forgotten the natural vanity of her sex. She was dressed in the simplest, plainest style imaginable; and had the glossy ringlets of her long dark hair required more than a moment's thought, they would never have fallen in such luxuriant beauty over her brow and cheek.

By my sister's children, Kate Somerville was little less than worshipped; and notwithstanding she both gave the law amongst them, and administered summary justice, they desired nothing so much as to monopolize her whole attention; while, on every symptom she evinced of yielding herself to their caresses, she was enclosed in all their little arms at once.

She had never looked so amiable to me, as in the midst of this little group; and I could not help mentally exclaiming, "Is this the woman who has no one to help her to bear the weight of sorrowful experience? No one to sooth her in affliction? No bosom-friend to shield and cherish her?"

I think she must have read my thoughts in the long earnest gaze I fixed upon her; for, though she suddenly averted her face, and stooped down to attend to one of the children, I could see that the rosy blush of former days had risen to her cheek; and when she looked up,

and spoke to me again, there was a glistening in her eyes, like the trace of tears which had been driven back.

Altogether there was a mystery about Kate Somerville which I vainly attempted to unravel; nor was it until my strength enabled me to accept the invitation of her father to spend a day at the Hall, that I could form any conjecture as to the change which seven years had produced in her character and appearance.

The first mild day of spring weather, I spent in revisiting scenes once so familiar, that I should have believed it impossible ever to forget them; and yet, as we pursued our way, I had to trust myself to the guidance of my companion, to lead me along the nearest path. Perhaps I ought rather to say, to the guidance of her horse, for she herself appeared to be entirely absorbed in her own thoughts; so much so, that she answered me at random when I spoke to her, and for the sake of keeping up the conversation, made the most commonplace remarks—a fault which she, of all women, had formerly been least addicted to.

“I am happy,” said I, as we stopped, as in by-gone days, to gaze upon a favourite scene, “I am happy to find something still unchanged. Tell me, Miss Somerville, shall I see the old Hall the same?”

“The house,” she answered very gravely, “is little altered. It has still a bright fire for a winter’s evening, and a warm welcome for an old friend. But how is it, when all the world grows weary with the same thing, that you alone find fault with change?”

“No one likes to meet with changes in their friends.”

“Oh, yes! when they grow better. When they turn grave, for instance, after they have been too flippant.”

She said this with a look and tone so like her former self, that the barrier of reserve was at once broken between us, and we were Kate and Arthur to each other again, apparently with the tacit understanding that we stood in all respects on the footing of our former friendship.

"Yes, Kate," said I, "you were indeed rather flippant when I was last here. And now I have need to listen to your voice, and hear you call me by my name, to believe you are the same."

"I am not the same," she replied in a voice rendered tremulous by suppressed emotion. "You will be mistaken indeed if you expect to find me so. Yet the change you cannot but observe, is not the effect of any distinct calamity. One affliction, however great, is seldom sufficient to bow down the spirit; especially such a spirit as mine. It is the gnawing anxiety of years, that nature is unable to sustain."

"But you can have no anxieties, Kate. Your father still lives"——

"Let us ride on," said she hastily, "we shall keep him waiting for his dinner."

We pursued our way accordingly, and as we approached her father's house, notwithstanding she had told me it remained unchanged, I could not but observe a want of neatness in the fences, and an aspect of neglect about the grounds, which, however, I accounted for in my own mind, by the circumstance of her father's advancing years, and the probability that he was less accustomed than formerly, to superintend his labourers himself.

On entering the court-yard, this aspect of indescribable forlornness was still more striking. Grass and weeds had grown almost entirely over the stones, and one or two

shutters were hanging from the windows of the lower offices by a single nail, while others swung to and fro in the wind. But for the melancholy aspect which pervaded the scene, I might easily have dreamed myself back again, and have believed it had been only the day, or the week before, that I had trod those stones; for, to my utter astonishment, who should I see but the identical figure of Mr. Ferguson advancing towards us, and looking precisely the same as when I had seen him last. I observed on his first appearance that Miss Somerville's colour rose, and when he took hold of her rein, and attempted to assist her from her horse, she suddenly sprung to the ground, thus leaving him the privilege of calling the groom, or of conducting it to the stable himself.

"You are longing to find something unchanged," said she, as I walked beside her to the door, "look at that man!"

On all my former visits to the Hall, the kind and hospitable master of the house had been one of the first to welcome my arrival. The elasticity of his step, the air of ancient gentility which pervaded his whole appearance, but above all, the cordial shake of his hand, were never to be forgotten by those who had been his guests; and I felt on the present occasion a little disappointed, that he did not meet me as before. Nor was this feeling unmingled with a fear that he might be suffering from the decrepitude of age. On entering the drawing-room, however, I found him seated in an arm-chair beside the fire; and, though he then rose to welcome me, I had some difficulty in assuring myself of his identity. It was not altogether age which had wrought the change so evident in his appearance; but a combination of many causes, and especially one, the extent of which I was not

then fully aware of. There was something about him which both shocked and grieved me, though I should have been at a loss to say why. He seemed as if, in the full possession of his bodily powers, he had sunk prematurely into a state of mental—or rather moral weakness—so much so, that I felt a difficulty in addressing him on any of the usual topics of conversation.

It was no doubt evident to the quick eye of his daughter, that I was contemplating her father's altered appearance with surprise and sorrow; for she instantly endeavoured to divert my attention, and during the whole time we sat at the dinner-table, she did this with so much tact and skill, that I had no opportunity, even if I had felt the inclination, to pursue my observations farther. She had previously requested me, in a manner half playful and half serious, not to sit long after dinner; and I had no difficulty in complying with her request, for a painful scene presented itself on her leaving the room. Mr. Somerville then grew talkative, and even jocose, and would have entered at great length into some of his favourite schemes for the benefit of mankind, had not Mr. Ferguson checked his garrulity, by exercising over him a kind of mysterious influence, to which the old man appeared to have become but too willing a slave.

It was indeed not difficult for me to tear myself from such society, to join Kate Somerville in the drawing-room. I found her seated by the fire, her head resting on her hands, and her whole attitude and appearance betraying the deepest melancholy. Yet she started up as I approached, shook off her reverie, and endeavoured to converse in her accustomed spirited and lively manner. I could discover, however, that her thoughts were wandering; and often during the course of the evening,



when I was engaged in answering questions which she had asked for the sole purpose of keeping me occupied, I could see that her attention was turned to the door, as if she was listening for some expected sound.

At last there were sounds from the dining-room; perhaps of the most humiliating and painful description to which the human ear has ever been accustomed—sounds which indicated, but too plainly, the degradation of old age—consisting of fits of childish laughter, of a tremulous and broken voice raised above its natural height; and then of sudden deep low tones of imperious command, as if the victim of his own folly would still assert a sort of dominion over others.

Kate Somerville opened the piano, and began to play a lively air.

“It is not often,” she said, “that ladies invite themselves to sing; but here is an old Scotch ballad that I think will just suit your taste; unless, indeed, seven years have altered you as much as they have altered some others.”

I disclaimed, of course, all change of taste in this respect; and she began to sing without farther prelude.

I have looked at the faces of what are called good singers, when their voices were in full operation, and the charm of their performance has been instantly destroyed; but with Kate Somerville the case was widely different. She had too much truth, even in her countenance, for it to suffer distortion under the influence of music so sweet and touching as her own; and it was not the least charm amongst the many she possessed, that when she was singing, you might gaze with pleasure, as well as listen with delight.

There was certainly something in her music which

exercised a sort of spell over me, for no sooner was her ballad concluded, than I forgot myself so far as to exclaim—"This will not do, Kate. You must not sing to me, unless you are prepared to go back with me to India, to share the good and the evil of my wandering and uncertain life."

I never shall forget her manner of receiving this very dubious expression. She neither smiled nor blushed, but looked at me for one moment with a degree of distressing earnestness; then, closing the piano, she walked to the other end of the room, took a chair by the fire, and as soon as I had joined her, began to question me in a very common-place but determined manner, about some of the customs of the East.

This conversation was only interrupted by the servant bringing in tea, which we took alone, there being no disposition in those we had left at the dinner-table to join our party.

The tea-service had scarcely been dismissed, when Miss Somerville was called out of the room, and such were the confused and mysterious sounds in the hall, which immediately followed, that I unconsciously, and by a sort of natural impulse, opened the door. What, then, was the horror I experienced, on beholding the almost senseless, and deathlike form of Mr. Somerville supported in the arms of his servants, and borne, as quietly as they could carry him, to his own chamber. My attention, however, was chiefly directed to the figure of his daughter, who had placed her arms beneath her father, with his head resting on her shoulder, and his white hair against her cheek, and who in this manner took her part—the most arduous of all—in bearing the helpless burden.



*Interior of - Amerville Hall*



Shocked at having been the witness of such a scene, I still persuaded myself none of the party had observed that I was so; when Kate Somerville, on returning to the room, entered immediately upon the subject by alluding to what I had seen.

"I am little skilled," said she, "in keeping my feelings to myself. And why should I attempt it, when the cause of my disquietude is so obvious. My poor father"—

And as she uttered these words, she covered her face with her hands, and burst into an agony of tears.

"You know," she continued, as soon as she had partially recovered her self-possession, "that he used to be fond of sitting long at the table over his wine. But I never thought it would come to this! And that man—that cruel man—keeps humouring him up to his bent, and I have no influence with him whatever."

"Have you tried your influence?" I asked. "Have you spoken to him on this subject, kindly and candidly?"

"Why, no. There lies my sorrow, and my guilt. There lies my difficulty too. My poor father, you know, was always so correct, and so precise, that I thought he would be shocked beyond measure, and offended past forgiving me, if I hinted such a thing to him in the beginning of the evil; and then as it grew, and became established, I felt more and more repugnance to act so ungenerous a part, for he had ever been so indulgent and so kind to me, it seemed too dreadful to be thought of, that I should turn upon him with the accusation of so gross a sin. So, as I said, the thing went on: and now it would be of no use, for I believe he has lost the power to resist."

"You might still make the experiment," said I. "That could do no harm; and you would at least

enjoy the satisfaction of having done a part of your duty."

"I wish I could," she answered; "from my heart I wish I could. But, strange as it may seem, I want the moral courage. When I first began to see the evil, I thought I should be able to speak, if it increased; and now I think I should be better able, were it only commencing. And, so it is—we shrink from the most obvious duty, until the time to perform it has passed by, and then waste the remainder of our lives in unavailing regret."

"Mr. Ferguson, you say, encourages it?"

"Oh, yes! There is a long history of that man's connexion with my father, which you will probably some time become acquainted with. In one way or other they have been engaged in business together almost ever since you left this country. Nothing, however, has answered with them, until the new manufactory, which you must have seen in coming. Here so many hands are employed, and such mighty wonders done, that the poor people around us think we must be worth a world of wealth. But what would money avail us, if we had the wealth of Croesus, and my poor father carried up every night, as you have just seen him. It is true, there are days, though few and far between, when he seems to make an effort to be his better-self again; and it was seeing him so well yesterday, and hearing that Mr. Ferguson was away, which induced me to ride over to your brother's this morning, with an invitation which I believed you could not refuse; for I thought it possible, that by securing your company to-day, I might delay your knowledge of my father's actual state. No sooner did I see Mr. Ferguson, however, than I knew how the day would close; for I always observe, that my father is least like himself, when that man is here."

Miss Somerville then added: "You are not one of those summer friends to whom I would apologize for your visit having been made so unpleasant. You remember, I doubt not, the happy meetings we used to have at this fire-side; and if the change is painful to you, what must it be to me?"

"And is there nothing that can be done?" I asked.

"Nothing that I know of," she replied. "Night after night I sit by this solitary hearth, brooding over the same subject; looking at it in every point of view, and asking in vain if nothing can be done. Perhaps," and she looked eagerly in my face, as if struck by some new, and forcible idea: "perhaps if I could talk to my father about religion, it might do some good."

"Have you never tried it?"

"Ah! no. I am miserably dark myself. Our good pastor used to warn me, that the time would come, when I should need to realize the hopes I was so fond of speculating upon; but since he left us, no one has ever talked with me on this subject, and by degrees I seem to have lost the little hold of it I once possessed. Can you not help me here?"

I was silent; and we two friends—friends not only in name, but friends who would each have done and suffered much to save the other from a moment's pain, sat together alone, after seven years of separation—one having known much of the painful experience of sickness, and the other of sorrow; and each met the inquiring glance of the other, with the total blank of fatal ignorance on that one subject, which it was becoming daily and hourly more important for us both to understand.

Oh, who shall dare to call himself by the sacred name of friend, unless he can answer such an appeal as was

made to me that night, by the woman I had left so gay and happy—the woman, whom I found on my return bowed down with anxiety and grief—forced even to the verge of premature old age, so much had sorrow worn away the bloom and the vivacity of her youth.

Yet by this sacred name, I scrupled not to call myself; and such had been the effect of affliction on the mind of Miss Somerville, that she seemed, from the very weakness of her unsupported nature, to derive more satisfaction than in former years, from the idea that I really was her friend. In this manner, our acquaintance was renewed, with only one point of difference in our intimacy, which, on my part at least, was more felt than understood.

I had been accustomed, in bygone days, to regard Miss Somerville as something of a coquette; for she had a habit of perpetually leading one's attention to herself, and would rather provoke anger or reproof, than submit to be unnoticed. Thus she had been a little too fond of placing her peculiarities in a conspicuous point of view, as well as of piquing the vanity and wounding the self-love of those who formed her little court, in order that she might enjoy an opportunity of flattering them more effectually by her attentions, and soothing them by her yet more irresistible kindness.

All this, however, had now vanished as completely as if she had never known what it was to be admired. She now seldom spoke of herself, and, even when conversing with me, would always change the conversation as soon as my observations referred to her own character and situation. This I regretted the more, as I found that her feelings, in their subdued and altered tone, her affectionate solicitude for her father, and the difficult and isolated position she held, as the only child of such a parent, were



all combining to render her an object of deeper interest to me, than she had ever been before ; though the apparent coldness of her manner effectually repelled me whenever I attempted to give utterance to such feelings.

The time was now approaching for me to decide upon whether I should return to India ; and as long illness had exercised considerable influence over my habits, by damping the ardour of youthful enterprise, I will not deny that certain calculations upon the fortune of Miss Somerville, did occasionally mingle themselves with my admiration of her character. The possession of such a fortune would enable me with prudence to resign my commission. If, therefore, Miss Somerville would not allow me to introduce the subject in the customary manner, it became necessary to the arrangement of my plans, that I should adopt some other method of bringing the question to a final decision. It was doubly painful to me to have no other alternative, because I knew that her fortune and her position in society had rendered a mere proposal of marriage a circumstance of such common occurrence in her experience, as to be despatched in the most summary manner ; yet I trusted to her good sense and generosity for pardoning in me, what she had left me no means to avoid.

Nothing could be more embarrassing to me, however, than the perfect silence with which my proposal was at last received. I could see that she was affected by it—perhaps too much affected for words ; but in what manner I was at a loss to comprehend ; and I had nothing left but to implore her to answer a question on which depended my happiness here, and perhaps hereafter.

“Then I will treat you with a frankness equal to your own,” said she, “and briefly answer—No ! Whether my

answer is dictated by duty or inclination, can be of little consequence to you to know. It is as irrevocable as if you were to me the least attractive being upon earth."

There remained little more for me to say, for there was a firmness in the tone and manner of Miss Somerville, which left no doubt as to the strength of her determination. We were therefore pursuing our walk in silence, when I perceived with surprise, that while she often turned away her head, as if to look at the plants by the way, or the prospect we were leaving, tears were absolutely streaming from her eyes, so fast, that it was no longer possible to conceal them from my observation.

Encouraged by this evidence of emotion, whatever might be its secret cause, I very naturally resumed the subject of our conversation, to which, however, she only replied with more firmness and decision.

"Do not," said she, "I entreat you, do not mention this subject to me again. The convictions which have already dictated my reply, are not to be set aside by persuasion. One thing, however, I would ask of you, and I ask it in all humility—do not take my answer unkindly—do not let it separate us as friends. I have been endeavouring, by the most scrupulous behaviour, to convince you, that I could be nothing more to you, nor you to me; and I am pained to the heart that you have not better understood me. You understand me now; and I repeat again—do not let this foolish business separate us as friends. I have no brother—I might almost say I have no father now. Do not utterly forsake me in my desolation."

I told her then, for the first time, that I was about to return to India.

She started; but immediately went on—"Let us be

like fellow-travellers then, who know that at the next stage they must separate for ever. Let us part kindly, for the dream of our friendship will indeed have passed, when you leave your native land again."

Of all the different kinds of romance which take possession of the female mind, there is none more unintelligible to man, and few more unacceptable, than that friendship which she sometimes proposes to him in the place of love. Had I better understood the character and situation of Kate Somerville, I should have known, in her case at least, that she both offered it herself, and needed it from me, in no ordinary or trifling degree, and that the kindness she asked of me in this melancholy and humble manner, she had richly earned the right to demand, by the noble sacrifice she was making, as she believed, in my favour.

It may easily be supposed, that after this interview I became a less frequent visitor at the Hall; for I had never, even when a youth, been sufficiently poetical to understand the luxury of cherishing a hopeless attachment. I consequently busied myself with preparations for my return to India, and thought as little of my disappointment as I could.

Kate Somerville, I observed, whenever we met, was much altered. She attempted to be lively, but her forced spirits failed her more than ever; and it was not difficult to perceive that some mental, or rather spiritual conflict was absorbing every thought. My sister often wished that she had some experienced adviser with whom she might converse confidentially; but, happily for her, she had already begun to feel that there is a consolation beyond what human love can offer—a Friend whose counsels are more salutary than those of any earthly adviser.

Unacquainted with the exercise of a mind thus engaged, and unable to sympathize in its deep experience, I became gradually estranged from the society of my sister's friend. An indescribable feeling that our destiny was tending different ways, seemed to keep me at a distance from her, though whenever we met, there was an humbled and a chastened expression in her features which made my heart ache to think what she was suffering, or had suffered. At times I wished to escape from the pain of seeing her thus altered; and then again, I wished more earnestly that I might stay, and be ever near her, if by this means it would be possible for me to partake of that influence which I could not but be sensible was purifying and elevating her character.

It is often observed, that before the hour of final dissolution, the appearance of the human sufferer undergoes a striking, and almost supernatural change, as if preparatory to that great event. And is it not often, to a certain extent, the same, before some of those fearful trials which mark the most important epochs of human existence? And merciful it is in the dispensations of Providence, that so few are wholly taken by surprise. Surprise, indeed, we may feel as to the nature of the trial which awaits us; but do we not often find, on looking back from such events, that there was previously a kind of awe surrounding us—a gloom—a gathering like that which comes before a storm; or a silence still more deeply felt—a suspension of our ordinary being—as if to give us time to call up from long-neglected sources, the support which our suffering and feeble nature was about to require?

## CHAP. IX.

## SOMERVILLE HALL.

THE time of my departure for India was still unfixed, and we were all watching one evening with some anxiety the return of the messenger who brought our letters from the nearest town, when a servant from Somerville Hall galloped up to the door, and throwing the bridle over the neck of his horse, walked straight into the hall with a note for my brother.

Mr. Langton tore open the note, and, having glanced over the first line, turned quickly to the servant, when they both walked out upon the lawn in front of the house. In a few moments I saw my brother's servant leading out his master's horse already saddled.

"He surely will not go," said Lucy, "without telling us what is the matter." And at the same instant he entered the room.

"I am going to ride over to the Hall," said my brother, in a tone of assumed composure. "Mr. Somerville has been taken suddenly ill, and I must not delay. You, Arthur, can ride after me, and bring back the tidings to Lucy, in case I should be detained."

I did so accordingly, and reached the entrance of the avenue as soon as my brother. We rode to the door in silence. Here we encountered the old housekeeper wringing her hands, and telling us everything but what we wished to know.

“And Miss Somerville?”—I asked.

“My poor young mistress,” said the woman, giving way to a fresh burst of grief, “sits beside him like the ghost of what she was. She neither speaks, nor sheds a tear. The doctor says she must be got away; but she won’t listen to any of us, sir.”

And there, indeed, she was, too truly like the ghost of what she had been—immoveable, and pale as marble; while, stretched upon his bed, lay the senseless form of her father, whose fixed and death-like countenance she was watching with an earnestness which rendered her blind to every other object.

“He is not gone yet,” she whispered, as soon as my brother had spoken to her. And again applying her fingers to his pulse, she repeated, “He is not gone yet.”

My brother would have gently led her away; but she resisted his endeavours with an expression of countenance which at once forbade all farther interference. It was not a time or a place to apply to her for information; and all I could gather from the domestics was, that Mr. Somerville had that day appeared to be in his usual health. That after dinner, he and his daughter had been for some time in the library together, when they heard a frightful shriek, and hastening into the room, beheld their master leaning back in his chair, his countenance slightly distorted, and his whole appearance bearing every mark of approaching death. Medical assistance had been immediately obtained; and, though the circumstances of the case afforded little ground for hope, a hint had been thrown out, that if in a few hours the vital spark should not become extinct, a favourable change might probably take place.

In such a situation, Miss Somerville could not be

deserted by her friends; and my brother, with his accustomed kindness, remained at the Hall, while I returned to inform my sister, as far as I was able, of all which had occurred.

On the following morning I was early on my way to Somerville Hall; and, musing as I went upon the many circumstances under which I had traced that path, I happened to turn my attention towards the large building called by the country people "Ferguson's Factory." At the same moment I was struck with the fact, that it was not as usual pouring forth its thick volume of smoke, to darken and pollute the air. My attention was afterwards attracted by groups of work-people in the village through which I passed, collected into little companies, and evidently talking over some momentous affair of general and individual interest.

Concluding it was the alarming illness of a common friend and benefactor, which very reasonably excited so universal a sensation, I passed on, without any inquiry, from one party to another, until stopped by an old woman whom I knew to have been a dependant upon the bounty of Miss Somerville, and who now eagerly inquired of me, if I thought they knew at the Hall what had happened.

"What do you mean?" said I. "They must know it—they know it too well."

"What! that he is off out of the country, and all the works stopped, and nobody left to pay?"

A new idea now flashed upon me. It was but too probable, and but too true. I hastened on to find my brother, and, desiring to speak with him alone, told him all I had heard and seen.

"Villain!" he exclaimed, as the whole truth by degrees

presented itself. "We might have foreseen this: a child might have foreseen it. And yet none of us could step forward and rescue this old man from ruin."

A letter which Miss Somerville was able, in the course of a few days, to write to my sister, will throw further light on this subject. It began with a description of her own situation, in her father's chamber at midnight, where he slumbered still insensible to all that was transpiring around him.

"I owe it," said the writer, "to his memory if he dies, to his character if he lives, to vindicate him from the charge which many will be too ready to bring against him—that of having been the victim of mere animal excitement. In the sight of God, I have no apology to offer; but, in that of man, it may surely be some extenuation of his fault, to say that he was goaded on to ruin by causes which he ceased at last to have sufficient moral power to resist.

"His connexion with Mr. Ferguson was, from its commencement, most disastrous. Sums of money seemed to escape from his possession, without his being aware of their amount, and every new scheme increased, instead of redeeming, his past losses. Besides which, he never was calculated for business. It harrassed his mind, and destroyed his natural rest. He became irritable and apprehensive; while the false stimulus to which he had recourse, served to give him nerve for the moment, and even inspired him with energy for new enterprize; so that he became at such times a pliant and willing instrument in the hands of a man who needed my father's credit and capital to prosecute his own schemes.

"It is difficult to understand how my father's honour-



able feeling should have been so far overcome by one who was altogether unworthy of his confidence, except that he always attached so much importance to ingenuity and enterprise, that they covered from his sight a multitude of sins. And as to my own influence, I had shown my deep-rooted dislike to this individual in a manner too decided and ill-judged for my father to attribute it to anything but prejudice. His ear was therefore closed against all I might have to say.

“In this manner his affairs went on, until they became almost too desperate for hope. One thing after another had failed: none prospered with him. But still he had credit, and, upon that, fresh schemes were undertaken; while his debts were increasing on every hand. By mere chance, I had myself become acquainted with these appalling facts, and you may be sure that I reasoned with him—that I pleaded and prayed he would make an honourable stand against the encroachments of fallacious hope, and, by giving up the remainder of his property, that he would leave us our integrity, at least, for the solace of old age. But, unfortunately for my cause, the tempter was ever at hand, and my father was growing imbecile; while his moral feeling was failing even faster than his bodily strength. I grew desperate at last, and threatened to expose our situation to the world, rather than we should go on deceiving every one around us, and many to their own loss. It was then, in an evil hour, they finally overcame me—my father, by his tears; while they bound me by a solemn vow, never, without his sanction, to communicate to any human being the real state of his affairs.

“You have often asked me why I did not marry. Here, then, you read the cause. I can, however, say with

truth, that never have I been tempted but once to adopt this means of escape from the gathering storm which seemed threatening to overwhelm me. Once, I confess, I did, for a moment, allow myself to dream of the happiness of escaping to a foreign land, until the blast should have blown over. But, knowing that my reputed fortune was an object of consideration, I could not bear the idea that any man—especially the one who interested me most—should awake from his visions of wealth, to find he had married a poor and portionless wife.

“The darkest page of my history is yet to come. May reason last me to the end ! I have not lived to my present age, and seen and felt what I have done, without having had many serious thoughts on the subject of religion ; more especially, since I have seen that in my father’s case, it was the only thing that could save him. Still I was dark—miserably dark on that subject myself ; yet, as everything earthly seemed to be receding from me, as one hold after another gave way, and friendship, all but yours, began to fail, I felt, more than ever in my life, an awful and imperative call, to look into my real position with regard to time and eternity.

“I will not attempt to describe to you the state of mind which followed. I saw but too clearly what I might have been to my poor father. I felt what I was ! Something, however, I imagined might yet be done. I carefully watched my opportunity—and, on that awful day, I had followed him into his study, for the purpose of appealing to his better feelings, and inducing him to render justice to others, and thus, if possible, obtain peace for his own mind, to which he had long been a stranger. I cannot repeat to you my words. But, if ever I spoke reasonably—if ever I spoke forcibly in my whole life—it

was on that solemn occasion. For some time my father made no reply. His silence filled my mind with the dread of having offended him beyond forgiveness. I burst into tears, for it is a bitter thing for a daughter to reprove a father whom she loves. He was not insensible to my anguish; and, raising his eyes, I saw that a flood of light, like sunshine over a landscape, was diffusing its benign influence over every feature of his face. It was the welcome of a father's love; and, as he opened his arms to receive me, I fell upon his bosom, too happy to be sensible of anything, but an unexpected thrill of gratitude and joy.

“‘My child,’ said he, in tones of the gentlest tenderness, ‘do with me what you will. From this hour we will begin a new life. You shall be to me my good angel. My affairs are in your hands. Render justice, if it be possible, to all.’

“I closed my eyes, and remaining still folded in my father's arms, I silently offered thanks to the Father of mercies, for thus awakening us both to a new existence, which I solemnly resolved should be devoted to his service.

“While occupied with these reflections, I thought I felt my father's hold relax; and raising my head, I saw that his own was drooping, while his hand dropped lifeless by his side. I scarcely know what followed. My cries brought in the domestics. Medical assistance was happily at hand; and the next thing I recollect was, that your husband and your brother, with their wonted kindness, came to my aid. Mr. Langton will tell you all the arrangements we have made together; for I consider the words my father uttered a sufficient sanction for the measures I have thought it right to adopt.

“One of my chief objects in writing this, is to impress upon you, and yours, the importance of attending to the claims of duty before it is *too late*. You see the consequences of my delay. A few years earlier, it is possible my father might have recovered himself, before his mental and moral strength were gone—a few years earlier, he might have retained his respectability before the world, and have lawfully enjoyed the comforts of our happy home—a few years earlier, he might have had sufficient energy to redeem the past, and to devote himself to the service of his God, and the good of his fellow men. What is his situation now? The pulse of life still beats in his veins; but senseless and child-like, he remains perfectly unconscious of what has passed, or what is passing around him. And I, upon whom this burden of responsibility has so long rested, have been trifling months and years away, until at last, when the anguish of awakened feeling roused me into action, it was my just punishment to find it was *too late*. This awful sentence seems now to be written on the walls of my solitary chamber—on my pillow—on my brow; and will it not be inscribed upon my father’s tomb? Oh may he yet be permitted to experience, if but one hour of natural and collected thought—one hour of preparation for his final change—one hour of repentance for those errors which, through the weakness, the unfaithfulness, and the neglect of his only child, may yet be made the ground of his final sentence—the seal of his doom through all eternity.”

The last and the most earnest prayer of the afflicted daughter was not rejected. Her father lived to recover his powers of thought, though not of action—he lived to feel that she was indeed his good angel—the messenger

of reproof, but also of correction. He lived to recover his understanding ; but it was to find himself in an humble habitation, where a daughter's love had surrounded him with every comfort that was necessary for the remainder of his life. He lived to find that his hereditary home had passed into other hands, and that he was no longer the rightful owner of a noble mansion, and a wide domain. He lived to find that the man whom he had trusted with his confidence above all others, had wronged and deserted him. He lived to find, that while many friends had fallen away with his falling fortune, there were others whom adversity had bound more closely to his interests ; and one, above all, who renounced together the indulgences and the follies of her youth, to live but for his happiness, and his support ; reserving only for the comfort of his old age that small portion of the wealth she had been expected to inherit, which had been her mother's dowry.

It is true, Kate Somerville was a strict, an unflinching monitress ; for she had the sorrowful experience of the past to teach her, that though benevolence, and kindly feeling, and all the virtues which adorn the social fellowship of life, may be practised in a more than ordinary manner ; yet without religion, vice, even of the most repulsive nature, may creep in amongst them, and pollute the whole. Impressed with this conviction, she made her father the object of her constant care ; and as a parent guards a helpless child, so she watched over him in his weakness, with a solicitude which the dark past invested with a kind of fearful tenderness ; yet, at the same time with a trembling hope, which the brightening future finally confirmed.

Such, then, was the fate of Somerville Hall. For

many generations it had belonged to the family of that name. It was a situation peculiarly calculated for all that we combine in our ideas of earthly happiness; it was equally adapted for easy independence and rational enjoyment; and for being the centre of beneficial influence, of charity, and benevolence, to the surrounding neighbourhood.

It becomes a serious question: "Are there not other homes thus passing away from the hands of those who have long retained possession of their wealth, their influence, and their enjoyments? Are there not other daughters who see the same growing evil spreading its dark shadow around their hereditary hearth, casting dishonour upon the hoary head of age, and poisoning, with its deadly roots, all the sweet springs of domestic happiness, and do they still draw back—do they still refuse to stretch forth a helping hand, in time to stop the encroachments of this insidious but fatal foe?"

## CHAP. X.

## THE RISING TIDE.

THE stranger who visited the residence of Mrs. Falkland, on the western coast of England, could not fail to be struck with the picture of peace and comfort which her home presented. She was a widow lady; but her solitude was cheered by the society of a son and daughter, whose characters were now sufficiently matured to render them in all respects companions to their mother.

It was on one of the loveliest evenings of September, that Mrs. Falkland and her daughter, in company with an elderly gentleman, who had once been a friend of her husband's, sat upon a balcony which ran along the western part of her house, commanding the view of a wide expanse of ocean, and of the radiant sky, where the sun was just sinking below the horizon; while slanting rays of yellow light glanced over the shallow bay, where the receding tide had left the sands so smooth and wet, that they reflected, as in a mirror, the shadows of some fishermen who were gathering up their baskets, and preparing to return to their homes in the village.

The residence of Mrs. Falkland was one of a number of little villas, or genteel cottages, with their ornamental gardens, scattered over the woody hills that sloped down to the beach, where a line of rocks, in some parts majestically high, and in others accessible to the foot-passenger, formed a barrier against the waves, which, when the tide was high, dashed up amongst the many little bays and hollows of the shore.

The village to which the fishermen were returning, and which gave its name to many distant groups of houses, lay in a narrow dell, through which an impetuous little river forced its way along a bed of rocks into the sea; and though the sands on either side the stream looked as safe and solid as the earth itself, they were said to be uncertain and dangerous to cross in the vicinity of this stream. Still it was a thing of such frequent occurrence for horses and travellers on foot to pass that way, that no one thought much about the danger; and especially as the road along the beach was so much nearer than any other from the village to the neighbouring market town. The chief difficulty arose from some of the rocks jutting so far out into the sea, that all passengers were obliged to pay attention to the state of the tide, or the probability was, that even while plenty of space remained within the bay, they might find themselves hemmed in at these points by the waves having reached the rocks.

The country people, however, knew these dangers well, and strangers were under less temptation to seek the nearest way to the town; so that all the record of accidents on this spot, were a few stories of by-gone days, kept up by the fishermen and old women of the village.

"You must be happy in such a home as this," observed the gentleman, who looked with Mrs. Falkland and her daughter upon the scene above described.

"We are indeed happy," replied the daughter. "At least, we would not exchange our home for a palace." And she went on expatiating upon the many enjoyments the scenery and neighbourhood afforded; while her mother, observing that the air was growing cold, took the opportunity of withdrawing from the balcony.

"We who live in the midst of the noise and the tumult



of cities," resumed the visitor, "may almost be allowed to envy you the repose of a life like this—so free from anxiety, so tranquil, and so calm."

"And yet," said Miss Falkland, "we have our cares."

"Impossible! Julia. What can they be?"

"As a friend of my father's, I need scarcely scruple to speak to you of any thing connected with the happiness of our family. You know my brother?"

"Yes; and a finer youth I never saw, than George Falkland, when he was last in town."

"He is, indeed, the kindest of sons, the best of brothers. But even he may have his faults."

"The faults of youth—mere thoughtless follies. You must not make too much of them. He will grow wiser with advancing years."

"I wish it may be so. But at present he seems so much fonder of gay company than of his quiet home, that my mother seldom knows a happy day. Not that he is addicted to any particular vice, at least that we know of; but wherever he goes, he has a habit of staying out late at night, which throws my mother into such a state of nervous anxiety, that her health is seriously injured; while he, on the other hand, is so annoyed by what he calls her unreasonable solicitude, that he will not deny himself a single hour of convivial enjoyment for the sake of her peace of mind. Now it is such troubles as these, common and trifling as they may appear to others, which destroy the comfort of our otherwise happy home; and it seems the more to be regretted, that they should exist where there is so much affection and good feeling on both sides, and nothing else to mar our happiness."

"Youth and age," replied the visitor, "are apt to differ on such points; and perhaps both are incapable of making

sufficient allowance for the feelings which operate with the other. Yet, so long as your brother visits only in respectable families, and does not attach himself to any companion of bad principles, I should feel great hope of his ultimate recovery from these errors."

"But there is the root of our anxiety," said Miss Falkland, with increased earnestness. "My brother, I am sorry to say, does attach himself, by a very close intimacy, to a young man of the worst principles—a Ralph Kennedy, the only son of a worthy old man in this village, whose grey hairs may truly be said to be brought down with sorrow to the grave, by this ungrateful son. It is reported of the old man, that he sits up night after night, working at his desk, in order to keep a situation for his son, which his own infirmities have long since rendered him unequal to. And yet this young man—this Ralph Kennedy, is so idle and unsteady, as to be wholly unfit to succeed his poor father in a place of trust."

Before the conversation had reached this point, the sun had sunk below the horizon, the sands instantaneously assumed a dark grey hue; and ere the harvest moon, which the next hour rose, had shed her silver light over the woods and the fields sloping down to the tranquil bay, the tide had so far receded, that nothing could be seen of the ocean, but a long line of deep blue, stretching away into the distant west.

Miss Falkland prepared to lead her visitor into the house; when, rising from his seat, he observed, for the first time, that a quiet-looking young girl, apparently about eighteen, and dressed in white, had been their companion on the balcony; and with a sort of instinctive curiosity, he directed an inquiring look to Miss Falkland, which seemed to say, "Whom have we here?"

"It is only my cousin, Grace Dalton," said Miss Falkland, understanding him perfectly.

Seeing the girl did not attempt to rise, the old gentleman still lingered. "Won't you catch cold, my dear?" said he, with that familiar, but well-meant kindness with which old gentlemen are apt to address those who are between girls and women.

Grace Dalton rose, and thanked him respectfully, but immediately resumed her seat; and the door was closed upon the lighted room, and she was left to her evening meditations, and forgotten. Indeed it was very easy to forget Grace Dalton; she was so small and so still. She was an orphan, too, and very poor; but surely it is not possible, in such a kind world as ours professes to be, that these two facts should constitute any reason why persons are more easily forgotten. Oh no! It was because Grace Dalton, as we said before, was diminutive in her person, simple in her dress, timid, gentle, unobtrusive, and not remarkably pretty, that she was so often, and so easily forgotten; and though she was a poor relation, and always came last into the room, and looked so humble, that she might have almost claimed pity from a stranger, it frequently fell to her lot to find no room left for her at table. Whether intentionally, or by accident, the servants used to omit to place her chair; and when she did not actually appear, nobody remembered her existence sufficiently to calculate upon her coming.

Yet for all this, the humble and isolated orphan had her own little world of interest, in which she lived, perhaps, a life of deeper feeling, because it was so seldom shared with others. What was the reason why she sat out so late this evening, no one asked, nor would they, perhaps,

have felt more curious, had they seen the tears that were fast falling from her eyes, as she bent over the balcony, with her forehead resting on her arm. Perhaps it was something in the conversation which had pained her, for she was strongly attached to her cousin George, and often ventured to take his part, even when he was most in fault. She could not be made to see the desperate nature of Ralph Kennedy's principles; at least, she never joined in what her cousin Julia said against him; and thus she fell a little into disgrace, both with the mother, and the daughter.

Leaving this solitary girl to her uninterrupted meditations, we turn to a different scene, which at the same hour was taking place; where, seated around a social board, a little company of choice spirits, with George Falkland at their head, laughed away the last hours of daylight, and hailed the lamps that seemed to dance before them as brighter harbingers of a happier and more joyous night.

George Falkland had that day left his mother's house, in company with his friend, Ralph Kennedy, who was in great request at all the convivial meetings in the neighbourhood, not only for his musical talents, but his unrivalled good spirits, and good humour, which, without exciting any deep interest, made him a welcome guest wherever he went. It is true, he seldom went away from these meetings in a state very creditable to himself—it is true, he made his own gratification the sole object for which he lived—it is true, he left an aged father to toil for his support, because he had too much of what is called spirit to devote himself to any kind of regular pursuit. Yet, notwithstanding all this, he managed to keep what is considered good society; and to maintain for himself the character

of being a "good fellow"—"his own enemy," it was granted; but still he was accounted the enemy of no one else, and the best companion in the world.

It may be supposed, that such a character would often be deficient in those means by which the appearance of a gentleman is supported, while Falkland being ever ready to supply this deficiency, they became inseparable friends; and perhaps did, in reality, like each other as well as such characters are capable of liking anything beyond themselves.

On the night described, they had staid late, and the moon had risen high before either of them thought of returning home. At last, when Kennedy had sung his best song, Falkland rose from the table; for no one cared after that to hear an inferior voice.

"Come, come," said Falkland, laying his hand upon the shoulder of his friend, "it will take us a full hour to ride home, and we had better have the benefit of the moon over the sands; for I fancy neither you nor I see so steadily as we did this morning."

"Sands!" exclaimed half-a-dozen voices at once. "You won't go by the sands to-night."

"Won't I, though?" said Kennedy, rising, and immediately joining his friend; while both supported the dispute, until it ended in a bet, which appeared to render the enterprise of going by the sands, altogether much more attractive.

The two friends then mounted their horses, and set off merrily, taking the road which led immediately down to the beach. It was a beautiful night. A breeze had sprung up from the sea, and a few distant dark clouds came floating along with it towards the moon; but still she rode

high in the heavens, and her light was almost like that of day.

It was a beautiful night, and many were the lively jests with which the travellers amused themselves by the way ; for Kennedy, though scarcely able to keep his balance on his horse, had often, when in that situation, a spirit of drollery about him, more amusing than in his sober moments, to those who cared not from what source it came. All his odd movements, all the strange accidents which happened to him under such circumstances, he could turn to jest ; and the laughter and meriment with which they now pursued their way towards the sands, startled from behind the shadow of a rock, an old fisherman, who was watching his nets.

They had passed him by with a slight good-night, when Falkland wheeled round his horse, and asked him how long it would be before the tide would be up, and if they had time enough to reach the second headland which jutted out into the sands.

“Time enough,” said the old man, “if your horses are good. The tide won’t be up to the crags yonder, for half an hour yet.” And he pointed to a heap of black rock, at some distance out to sea.

The travellers now set spurs to their horses, not so much from any fear of the tide, as from the mere hilarity of their own spirits, which could not be satisfied with any sober pace. Capable, however, as Kennedy had been of keeping his seat under more favourable circumstances, he fell from his horse the moment it struck into a gallop ; and whether from the violence of the fall, or the novel position in which he found himself, he became so bewildered and confused, as to be long before he could regain

his seat. Even then he rode with his head sometimes bent over the neck of the horse, and sometimes thrown back, while the loss of his hat, and other accidents, occasioned both laughter and delay. To increase their difficulties, a dark cloud now spread over the moon, so that they lost sight for a time of the high land, which, terminating in a rocky ridge, stretched far into the bay, and formed a point, which they must pass before they could even reach the stream where the passage was accounted most dangerous.

Still their horses were safe, and well accustomed to the road; and as danger was the last thing that either of them would have dreamed of at that moment, they only rode more leisurely, altogether unconscious of the time they had lost by the way.

"I wish that cloud would pass," said Falkland, at last. "I cannot see the crags at the point, whatever I would do. And there is a kind of rushing in my ears, as if the tide was coming up; but that is impossible, for the old man said it would be more than half an hour before it reached the crags, and they are a mile off at least."

The cloud did pass; and—was it the moonlight that lay so white before them on the sand? No: it was the tide running up in long sheets of hissing foam, each one stealing farther than the last.

"Set spurs to your horse," cried Falkland, "and ride, Kennedy, ride, for your life!"

He did so, and down he fell again upon the sand; and the foam curled up and around him, and then retreated, while he mounted again to make another fruitless attempt at greater speed.

"We shall escape yet," said Falkland. We are just

upon the crags, and when these are passed, we have but the river, and all will be over."

The crags were now their most immediate danger, for slippery as they always were with the sea-weed, the surf was by this time dashing up amongst them, so that no horse could make sure of its footing; and here Kennedy fell again, and again it was so long before he could be replaced in his seat, that Falkland, on looking round to the next point, which it was necessary to gain in order to reach the village, saw that the whole extent of the little bay was one sheet of foam. Still it was not deep except in the bed of the stream, and their horses were untired; so that if Kennedy could but keep his seat, all might yet be well.

It was in vain, however, that Falkland rode close beside his friend, and stretched out his arm to keep him steady. He appeared to have become more and more confused with each repeated fall, while the unequal nature of the ground rendered it impossible for their horses to find safe footing, or to keep pace with each other. Falkland himself was but just able to think, and to wish that they had taken the route above the cliffs. He even stopped, and looked for a moment towards the land, to see if there was no place where it was possible to ascend, but in vain; and the next moment they plunged into the stony bed of the stream, and found themselves in deep water.

Kennedy had now fallen forward on his horse. The animal grew terrified, and, rushing desperately amongst the rocks and the foaming current, it shook itself loose from its rider, and then plunged forward, and left him to struggle for his life.

Falkland had now but one object—to place the







Painted by A. L. P. B. B. B. B.

Drawn by T. Allen

*The Riding Tide*

wretched man behind him, and trust to his own animal for sustaining both. For this purpose he stretched out his arm, and caught the hand of his friend, at the moment when he was rolling down the stream. He even succeeded so far as to lift him upon his horse, but all his strength was unequal to keep him there. He had become utterly helpless, and it now seemed as if, in attempting to save him, both must perish. Still, however, Falkland resumed the attempt. He even succeeded again, and was only defeated by Kennedy falling this time with his hand clenching the coat of his friend, with a wild and desperate hold, which it was impossible to shake off.

"My mother!" cried Falkland, as if the fierce waves could hear him. "My poor mother! She will never survive this night, if I am lost. It is yet in my power to save her from a broken heart."

With that he tore off the fragment of his dress, which that doomed and drowning man still held by, and, with one plunge of his horse, escaped out of the bed of the swollen torrent.

In the mean time, the lights were one after another extinguished in Mrs. Falkland's cottage; but the mother slept not, though she had retired at midnight to her own chamber. She slept not, for her nights were now but too frequently occupied in thinking to what the habits of her son would lead. She slept not, for memory was busy with his childhood, with the time when, as a sickly and fretful infant, he had demanded all her tenderness, and all her care. She thought of the sleepless hours, when she used to rock him on her bosom; how her time, her peace, her health, had been sacrificed, without a murmur, for his sake; and now, when she looked for her reward, when her own feeble strength required that rest she could not

find, he could not—he would not—deny himself a single hour of senseless mirth, to calm the anxiety that was wasting her life away.

The window of Mrs. Falkland's chamber looked upon the garden, that of Grace Dalton towards the yard, where it was impossible that a horse should enter, without her hearing it. What, then, was her surprise to hear the well-known signal of her cousin, without any previous notice of his coming! With a stealthy step, she trod as usual past the door of her aunt's chamber, and descended to the hall, where, drawing aside the bolt of the outer door, she stood expecting that her cousin would enter.

"I want to speak with you, Grace," said he in a voice so little like his own, that she started back. "Come away from the door, for no one must hear us talking. Come farther still, and be very, very quiet, while I tell you a sad story."

"Go on," said Grace, trembling all over. "I am quiet. Has anything happened?"

"Come out farther still," said her cousin; "and now be sure you do not exclaim, or make the least noise." He then whispered close to her ear, "Kennedy is lost!"

A shriek so loud that it seemed to ring through the vault of heaven, was the answer of poor Grace.

"There, now!" said he, grasping her arm, and speaking more angrily to her than he had ever done before. "You have done the very thing against which I warned you. I would rather have given you a thousand pounds than you should have uttered that scream."

Lights were now glancing in all the windows of the cottage, and before many minutes had passed, Falkland was compelled to describe to the whole assembled household, every particular of the sad catastrophe.

Even then, so great was the sensation it naturally excited, that scarcely could the presence of his living form convince them of his own safety. It was not difficult to read in his pale and haggard countenance the terrible conflict he had sustained; and while one brought him cordials, and another chafed his cold hands, Grace Dalton, who had wont to be the first to render all these offices of kindness, was the only one to stand aloof, as if altogether stupified by what had passed.

"Why do you stand there, child?" said Mrs. Falkland in her anxiety for her son. "Go up stairs, Grace, and bring dry clothes for your cousin."

The poor girl went up stairs as she had been told, but what it was to fetch, she could not by any possibility remember. Her delay was the cause of much chiding, which seemed to produce no effect upon her senses. As regarded all present things, they were quite gone, until Falkland called her to him, and whispered to her with a shudder on his lips, "Take that coat, Grace, and hide it, so that I may never see it more. The part that is torn away is where he held me with his dying grasp."

Grace Dalton took the coat as she had been requested, and no one knew how she disposed of it, for it was never seen again.

"And now," said Falkland, when his strength had been in some measure restored, "I have a hard duty to perform. I must go to old Kennedy, and tell him what has happened."

With this intention, he rose up, and even went as far as the door, when, turning back again, he sank down into a chair, exclaiming, "I cannot meet that old man! My heart fails me when I think that Ralph was the only

relation he had in the world—the only being he ever seemed to love. Will none of you go with me?”

“I will go with you,” said Grace.

“You, child!” was the general exclamation. But, finding that, although little could be hoped from her assistance, she was in reality more willing than any of the party, it was at last agreed that she should accompany her cousin, though not without many earnest charges from him, that she would neither shriek, nor faint, nor trouble him with any of her childish imprudence.

“No, dear George,” said she with such trembling meekness, that he could but cease to chide her—“I will be very, very quiet. You shall never have to find fault with me in this way again.”

“Come then,” said Falkland. “For once I will lean on your arm, instead of you on mine; and, if you like, Grace, I will tell you as we go, all the particulars of this melancholy story, in order that when any one asks for them, you may be able to tell it yourself, and thus spare me the pain. Would you like to hear it?”

“Yes; only I am afraid I shall not be able to repeat it.”

“Nonsense! You should nerve yourself to these duties. If it is difficult to you, think what it must be to me, who have still his death-grasp on my person; his last moan in my ear; his——What ails you, Grace? You are cold, child. The morning air is too sharp for you. Here, take this shawl, for they have given me more than I can bear; and you have no bonnet. What a foolish girl you are!”

Grace made no reply: but her teeth absolutely chattered; while the ghastliness of her countenance gave her

cousin fresh cause to think that the grey dawn of morning, now spreading over earth and sea, was too cold in its autumnal chill for the delicate frame of his companion, and he drew her closer to his side, and held her hand in his, with a brotherly tenderness for her bodily comfort, which he had been less ready to feel for that of her mind.

"There," said Falkland, for he had already commenced his story, "it was just in the direction of that stunted tree, half-way between the first point and the river, that Kennedy first fell from his horse. Look, Grace. Why, you are actually turning towards the land. Have you forgotten in which direction lies the sea?"

"I am looking," said Grace. "At least, I will look if I can, but the wind blows so fiercely." And she shaded her eyes with her hand, while her cousin went on with his story.

Long before he had concluded the melancholy detail, which to a less interested auditor would have been sufficiently distressing, they found themselves before the humble home of Kennedy's father.

It was a second-rate sort of house; and the one domestic who waited upon the old man, was yet too soundly asleep to hear their summons, for they knocked in a trembling and hesitating manner. At last they heard a slow step in the passage. One bolt was drawn away, and then another, and then the door was opened by the old man himself, who stood before them with an inquiring gaze, while he held in one hand a lighted candle, which had burned down into the socket.

Grace Dalton looked at her cousin. His lips moved—his voice faltered—he could not utter an articulate sound.

"Perhaps you will allow us to come in," said Grace;

"we have come to speak with you on very important business."

"Business?" repeated the old man, as well he might, at that hour of the morning, and with such guests. He admitted them, however; and, throwing open the door of his little sitting-room, it was easy to see that he had known no rest that night, for his table was covered with papers and account-books; and every thing wore the appearance of solitary and anxious toil—that toil of mind, and labour of calculation, for which old age is so unfitted. Without betraying any curiosity, he motioned for his guests to be seated, and resumed his own chair, waiting patiently for them to begin the conversation.

They were both silent; while the quivering fingers of Grace Dalton played amongst her hair, and her open lips were pale as ashes. At last she spoke.

"I think, Sir, you are aware where your son spent last evening."

"I know little of where he spends his evenings," replied the father, "and it has become a matter of small importance to me."

There was a real or assumed severity about old Kennedy, which drove most people away from him; and which might, possibly, have had its influence in estranging his son from the affections and the duties of home. But now this apparent coldness, while it shocked the feelings of Grace Dalton, gave her nerve to proceed, and she actually related the whole account of the fatal catastrophe, exactly as it had been told to her, only pausing occasionally to ascertain whether she ought or ought not to proceed.

"Go on," said old Kennedy, every time she stopped, in a deep-toned and sepulchral voice; but he never once looked up, nor changed his attitude, nor unclasped his



hands, that were closely folded together, with his lips pressed upon them, and his elbows supported by the arms of his chair.

“Go on,” he repeated, until the whole had been told; when he simply asked—“And the body?”

“I have stationed six fishermen from the village,” said Falkland, “along the bay, and three beyond the crags; but they say it is impossible it should be found before the tide goes down. I shall then be on the beach myself, and see that nothing is neglected. In the meantime, if you would like Grace Dalton to remain with you, she will be most happy to render you any assistance in her power.”

“Who is Grace Dalton?”

“The young person who has accompanied me.”

“I would much rather be alone; and, perhaps, the sooner you both leave me, the better.”

There was no forcing their presence upon him after this remark; and the two cousins arose, and left the room, with that stealthy step with which we instinctively tread in the presence of affliction; the old man neither rising from his chair, nor offering them the common civilities of one who takes leave of departing guests.

They had not left the outer door, however, before their progress was arrested by the sound of deep groans from within. They paused; for it was not easy to leave an aged man, under such circumstances, alone. They paused; for pity, as well as horror, seemed to chain them to the spot; and now they discovered that those strange and awful sounds were the strong prayer of mortal agony—that prayer which is wrung out from the human soul by its necessity, not by its inclination or its hope.

“He did love him, then!” exclaimed Grace Dalton; clasping her hands together; “He did love him as a father

ought to love a son ! May blessings fall upon the head of that old man ! ”

As she said this, a flood of tears gushed from her eyes ; they were the first she had shed on this melancholy occasion : for grief, that is mixed with horror, seldom causes tears ; while, add but to the bitter tide one drop of gratitude or joy, and tears immediately become the natural relief of the over-burdened heart.

“ Why, Grace,” said Falkland, as he led his cousin away from the house of mourning, lest by again yielding to her own emotion, she should be the cause of interruption or alarm to others—“ How is this ? You are overwhelmed with gratitude, because a stern old man is melted into common feeling by the death of his son. For my part, I should have felt more pity for him had he received the first intelligence more like a father, and a christian man.”

“ We cannot all feel alike,” said Grace, “ nor make the same display of sorrow when we do feel it. I confess, like you, I was shocked at the seeming apathy with which our intelligence was at first received. But those fearful groans, George, they surely tell of more than common grief.”

The grey dawn of the morning had by this time given place to the full light of day, though it was one of the darkest and the gloomiest of those which usher in the storms of winter. The stillness of the preceding night had occasionally been interrupted by a rushing wind, which now swelling into a strong gale, blew fiercely over earth and sea, sweeping across the bosom of the troubled ocean, and lashing the spray of the rising billows into one vast bed of foam. The tide was rolling out, but it retreated with an angry roar, as if unsatisfied with the work of destruction it had already accomplished.

All the distance from the village to the beach, was now scattered with groups of people, who, some of them from mere curiosity, and some from feelings of deeper interest, had left their homes, to hear if there were any tidings of the body, or to learn if anything more remained to be told than the melancholy story which had already circulated from house to house, with the usual number of variations and additions. Amongst these groups was many a poor mother with her children clinging to her cloak, all looking anxiously towards the sea, and yet all afraid to behold the object of which they were in search. There were men blessing and comforting themselves that their sons were not as this prodigal, who would never more return to his father's house. There were young women, who looked and looked again, and all the while kept close together, calling back to remembrance the kindness, the freedom, and the generous-heartedness of him who was lost; and there were old fishermen, telling of their own escapes, and wondering at, and settling, and unsettling again, the manner of the young man's death. And still the hoary deep rolled on, telling its dark secrets to none.

Falkland and his cousin approached the scene of interest from one point; his mother and sister, with their household attendants, from another. Way was respectfully made for all, and they stood together for some time without uttering a word, except to ask and tell in what manner old Kennedy had borne the intelligence of his loss. All looked towards the sea; and Grace Dalton, though she trembled violently, dashed away her hair from her eyes, and looked more intently than any of the watchers there.

"See, see," said Mrs. Falkland, "there is old Kennedy himself—and alone."

And there indeed he stood, the aged father, leaning on

his staff, with his white hair floating in the wind. He stood alone too, except for a faithful dog, that never left his side. He stood alone, for he had held no fellowship with others in the common avocations and interests of life, and therefore it was the necessary consequence, that in his grief they should hold none with him. Yet there was something almost more than human nature could endure, to see a father alone on such an occasion, and Grace Dalton left her aunt and cousins, and stealing quietly up to the ridge of high ground on which he had stationed himself, stooped down, and patted his dog, that she might at least be ready, if he should wish for any one to be near him.

Encouraged by having escaped a direct repulse, Grace ventured at last to stand nearer, and from a natural impulse upon which she acted almost unconsciously, she said, in so meek and quiet a voice, that it could not have offended any one, "Sir, will you not lean upon me, the wind is very strong?"

"Lean upon you, child?" said old Kennedy; "why should I lean upon you?"

And he turned half away from her, to look again at the sea without interruption.

Perhaps it was well that he had not accepted the offered aid of his young companion; for the next moment she was shooting like an arrow across the sands, straight on to a crag of black rock, which was just beginning to stand out above the shallow waves, and beside which some of the fishermen were now seen to be gathering themselves into a group.

"What can be the matter with Grace?" said Mrs. Falkland, observing the strange movements of her niece. "She seems to have quite lost her senses with this melan-

choly affair. You were wrong in taking her with you, George. She would have been much better at home. She has no spirits for such scenes as these."

"You are mistaken in Grace, I assure you," said Falkland. "She was of the greatest possible use to me this morning, and, really, behaved like a heroine. But see! They have found him: they have found him at last. I am sure that is the body."

It was true, as Falkland had said. The wretched man had not been washed by the waves to any great distance from the spot where he perished, probably owing to his dress having become entangled amongst the rocks; and there he lay, stretched out upon the sand, one of his cold hands still clenching, with an iron grasp, the shred of Falkland's coat, which he had torn off when they separated for the last time.

Nothing now remained to be done, for it was impossible that a spark of life should remain; and, while all stood around, uttering their different exclamations of regret, Grace Dalton remained on her knees beside him, stooping down with her head so low, that she could have heard the faintest breath had it passed his lips; though her hair fell down and shaded her face, so that none could see in what manner she was holding her strange communion with the dead.

It seemed as if the girl had forgotten the natural timidity—her aunt said, the natural modesty—of her sex; for, on first reaching the spot where the body had been dragged out and laid upon the smooth sand, she had torn open the vest of the drowned man, and laid her hand upon his heart, to feel if there was yet a throb, or a sense of human feeling, left. It was in vain. The fishermen smiled, with melancholy meaning in their looks, to see

her fruitless efforts, and the foolish hopes which none but a dreamer like herself could have entertained for a moment. But still she knelt beside him, and not the ghastly countenance, from which other women turned away ; nor the crowds that gathered round her, nor the spray of the sea-foam, nor the fierce wind that came with splashing rain, and drove half the idle concourse back to the village—had power to raise her from that lowly posture, until a bier was brought, and the body was placed upon it, and carried away before her eyes. Then she suddenly recollected herself, and, silently meeting the reproof of her aunt, she wrapped herself round with a shawl, and walked the last of all the party, as they returned to Mrs. Falkland's dwelling.

Our nearest relatives are sometimes the last to understand the real state of our feelings. The rude fishermen on the beach had seen at once, by the behaviour of Grace Dalton, in what relation she had stood to the deceased ; and they had regarded her affection with that respect which unsophisticated nature is not slow to render to real suffering. How little of this respect would have been shown by those in a higher sphere of life, who had undertaken the support and guardianship of the poor orphan—how little of this respect would they have shown, had they known that she had so far deviated from the principles carefully instilled into her mind, as to dare to love a man whose life and conduct were like those of Ralph Kennedy.

And why had she loved him ? Perhaps simply for these reasons—because he had been kinder than any other human being ever was to her ; because she was lonely, and he had been her friend ; because she was despised, and he had shown her respect ; because she was an orphan, and he had promised to protect her.

It needs little philosophy to account for the origin of love. There are human beings who cannot exist, of and by, themselves. Their very being is a relative one; and the more they are shut out from sympathy, and kindly fellowship, and the mutual interchange of thought and feeling with others—the fewer channels they find for the outpourings of natural affection—the stronger will the tide of that affection be when it does burst forth, uniting, as it were, in one living stream, all the pent-up and sealed fountains which lay beneath the sterile surface of their desert life.

Bitterly would Mrs. Falkland have reproached her niece, had she known why, amongst that crowd of strangers, she had stood the first—why she had approached the nearest to that awful spectacle—why she had been the only one to endeavour to unclench that cold hand—why she alone had hoped against hope, that there might still be life. Happily for poor Grace, the strangeness of her conduct met with no farther censure than its absence of decorum deserved, and this was even pardoned in consideration of the childish weakness with which she was so often charged; for, like most persons in her situation, she had often to bear the blame of a fault, and its direct opposite, at the same time.

No extenuation, however, ought to be offered for the chief fault of which Grace Dalton was guilty—that of loving a dissipated and unprincipled man. She felt that she deserved no pity, and therefore she asked for none. She had her punishment within herself; and the perpetual sense of condemnation which she bore about with her, made her still more meek, and humble, and submissive under reproof, than she would otherwise have been. Nor did she regard the errors of Ralph

Kennedy with more toleration, in her own mind, than the rest of the world evinced towards them. In proportion to the high estimate of what she believed to be his virtues, was her fear, her sorrow, her hatred of his vices. These, however, she never spoke of, except to himself. There were others to do that, she thought; and when so many voices were against him, there was the less need of her's.

Thus she was often thought to look with too lenient an eye, both upon his conduct, and that of her cousin George. The fact was, she loved her cousin because she believed that he loved Kennedy; and, had those who charged her with indifference to their vices, only followed her to the little chamber which she occupied alone—had they watched her there, when every other member of the household was wrapped in sleep, they might have seen such tears, and heard such prayers, as would have convinced them that vice in any form, but particularly in those she loved, was no matter of indifference to her.

There are strange contradictions in some of the popular modes of judging of human character—contradictions which, if they were to exist in religious society, would be laid hold of by the world, and exhibited to view, as proofs of the unsubstantial nature of all such profession. Amongst these, there is none more striking, and certainly none more injurious to the well-being of society, than the habit of attributing to young men of gay and dissipated habits, an excess of generosity, and an absence of selfishness, which are considered as outweighing all their moral delinquencies.

Whether this false estimate of character is derived from the glowing and attractive descriptions of some of the popular heroes of ancient, as well as modern romance;



or whether it is merely that mankind can accommodate their judgment to circumstances, so as to admire what it suits their inclination to imitate, it is not our business now to inquire. But it may not be foreign to the subject in hand, to tax the patience of the reader for a few moments so far as to ask, in what does the generosity and the disinterestedness of the characters alluded to, consist? Is it in their kind and consistent regard to the feelings of those by whom they are most beloved, and whom they profess to love in return? Is it in their self-denial—in the privations they undergo for the sake of promoting the happiness of others? Is it in the full and efficient returns they render for all the care and anxiety of which they are the cause? Is it in the abundant bestowment of their pecuniary means, to support the destitute, and to solace the afflicted? Is it in the faithfulness and punctuality with which they hold themselves ready at the call of duty to answer the demands of friendship and affection? Is it in the sacredness with which they fulfil every trust committed to their charge? Is it, in short, in their absence of self-love, and their disregard of self-gratification, in comparison with the gratification of their friends?

If there be any meaning in the words generosity, and good-heartedness, they would surely comprehend some of these points; and yet in all these, are the characters of the gay and the dissipated peculiarly deficient.

If we could, by any means of calculation, add together all the tears which such characters habitually and recklessly cause, all the hours of anxiety they inflict upon their near connexions, all the bickerings and disputes occasioned by their conduct between those who censure and those who defend them, all the wretched feeling they

leave behind them whenever they go out, all the anguish which awaits their return, all the disappointment of those who trust them, and, finally, all the wretchedness attendant upon the full developement of those vices, of which what the world calls gaiety is the natural and certain germ—if we could add all these together, we should behold a sum of human misery greater than ever was produced by absolute crime—by murder, theft, or any of those gross and desperate acts, against which public indignation is so justly and unanimously raised. If we could add all these together, we should see, operating through different channels, a mass of selfishness, with which that of the solitary miser bears no comparison.

The life of the gay man is, in fact, a system of self-indulgence, of self-gratification, of self-worship. The miser, in his despised and isolated sphere, has no power to prey upon the happiness of society. The privations he imposes, extend no farther than himself; and, if no other individual shares in what he gains, he is alone in the punishment he inflicts. But the dissipated man has a wider influence, because he is the hero of society in its worst state. He has therefore the power to disseminate the seeds of evil in a degree proportioned to his popularity; and in the same measure as he is beloved, he is capable of inflicting misery. He knows that he can do this, and he does it still. He knows that he is the cause of floods of burning tears, and while he weighs them against one intoxicating draught, it is self-love that prompts him again to hold the sparkling poison to his lips, and to let the tears flow on.

But to return to our story. The father of Ralph Kennedy saw, from the point of land on which he stood, that three or four fishermen were gathered together on

one particular part of the sand, and he knew from the number of persons who hastened towards the spot, that they had found the body of his lost son. It was not in his nature to connect himself with a crowd, especially on such an occasion. He therefore returned, silently and alone, to his own dwelling, where he gave the necessary directions to his only domestic, and then shut the door of his chamber, and listened for the footsteps of those who should bring home the dead. They were long in coming; and the servant had time to make ready a little parlour, considered more particularly as her master's own apartment, for it was here he used to keep his books, and here he used to sit through the midnight hours, waiting and watching for his son's return, it having been his custom never to allow any other person to be disturbed by his late hours.

While these preparations were going forward, Grace Dalton walked silently home with her aunt and cousins; when, on passing a cottage at the outskirts of the village, it suddenly occurred to her that help might be wanted in the house of mourning, and, stepping back a few paces, she entered the dwelling of a poor woman who was in the habit of attending on such occasions.

Like most persons in her situation of life, the woman began immediately to descant upon the character of the deceased adding her present testimony to her past forebodings, that it "would come to this." She always "knew it would come to this." With many wise and moral observations, which Grace considered rather ill-timed, and therefore reminded her that the unconscious object of her remarks was now dead, and that it became all who were left, to forget and forgive.

"As to forgiving," said the woman, "I don't know that

there's much of that needed, unless it is the injury done to my poor boy, who has never been the same since that young man came to our house ; for what with his jokes, and his songs, and his good-humoured laugh, and "—

"He used to come here, did he?" asked Grace, with a sudden glow of colour in her cheek, to which it had long been a stranger.

"Oh! yes, miss. He would sit here evening after evening, when our Ann was at home; and the poor girl takes on so. I am sure if he had been our equal, we could none of us have been more sorry; for he never seemed above being one of us, as I said before, when Ann was at home."

"Poor Grace! She thought she had suffered enough before; and now this woman was unconsciously mixing drops of bitterness with the draught, which she had not yet begun to feel was one of healing. And thus it must ever be with those who associate themselves in their affections with what is contrary to the nature of virtue and religion. It is not vice alone which, under such circumstances, must appal them; vulgarity must also repel, for there is no refinement—let poets and romances say what they will—there is no true refinement in a vicious life.

Grace Dalton, though simple in the extreme, was yet high-minded where her sense of delicacy was concerned; and when the daughter of this poor woman returned from the beach, sobbing, and making as much display as possible of her grief, Grace felt too much offended to permit her to remain another moment in the house. She was even going without having fully discharged her errand, but suddenly recollecting her own words—"he is dead now, those who are left, ought to forget and forgive,"—she

turned back, and requested the woman to make haste to the house of Mr. Kennedy, to offer her services there, and by no means to linger if they should not be accepted.

Notwithstanding the dreadful calamity which had so recently taken place, it did not so nearly touch the family of Mrs. Falkland, but that all was peace that day within her dwelling. Falkland, wearied out with excitement, had retired to rest; and by the time their evening meal was prepared, he was able to join his mother and sister once more around the social board.

The fierce gale of the morning had then died away; and when the moon rose, and shed her silvery light over the rough promontories that stretched away towards the sea, George Falkland and his mother sat again on the rose-covered balcony, their hands clasped together in that expressive silence, which conveys more meaning to the heart than the most eloquent words. His sister, too, was there, and Grace Dalton; and all looked towards the sea except Grace, who seemed to be teaching the clematis where it ought to climb, though her small hands trembled so that she could scarcely guide its fragile twigs.

Never are the beloved of the family circle so dear as when recently escaped from danger; and Mrs. Falkland and her daughter looked with affectionate interest at the noble youth who held a hand of each, and then at the wide sea, whose ruffled waves could still be heard retreating in the distance, and their hearts yearned over him as over a treasure newly found, or just redeemed from loss.

The subject of their separate thoughts was the same—the awful night that was past; when, another wave of that angry flood, another cloud over that clear moon, a moment less of time, and that vigorous form, so rich in all

the gifts of nature, so animate with life, and adorned with youthful beauty, might have been stretched upon the silent bier in a house of mourning and desolation.

"I cannot tell," said Falkland, as if thinking aloud, "how it was that that poor fellow so entirely lost his presence of mind. He had no more power to help himself, than a child would have had under such circumstances. And yet to see the mirth of his merry face not half an hour before, when we rode down to the beach, and the cliffs echoed with our laughter. When I think of this, and the last look of agony I caught as he fell back in the water, his clenched hand still holding that shred of my dress—Oh, mother! it makes me wish to hide myself in the earth, or in some place where this horrible vision never could pursue me."

"He was so unprepared, too," said Mrs. Falkland, "and such a character!"

"There are many persons," said Grace, "who die in their own chambers, and with all the warning of long illness, as unprepared as he was."

"Ah, Grace," said Julia Falkland, "will you never see these things as you ought to see them?"

"When young women like you," observed the mother, "who have been virtuously brought up—when such make excuses for the vices of men, what can we expect?"

"Shall I bring your shawl, dear aunt?" asked Grace. "The evening air grows cold."

"Perhaps we had better all retire," said Mrs. Falkland.

"No, no," said George, detaining both his mother and his sister. "And you, too, my poor little Grace. You shall no longer stand shivering there. Come sit down near to Julia; for I want you all to witness this night, that I

discharge my conscience of a load, so far as it can be discharged by an act which refers merely to the future. Would to heaven it could expiate the past!

“I now want you all to hear me, and to bear witness to my vow, while I look to yon dark sea with the same clear moon—the same blue skies above me—I want you all to bear witness to my vow, when I promise, that, as God will give me strength, from this time henceforward, I never more will grieve my poor mother’s heart as I have done—I never will stain my own character, nor suffer the moral degradation which man must suffer under the mastery of wine, and in the fellowship of those whose only enjoyment is the excitement for the moment, purchased by the sacrifice of domestic peace. Now, this is my vow. My mother, my Julia, my poor Grace, you must all help me to keep it.”

A solemn silence followed. The mother’s hands were for a moment clasped together in the attitude of thanksgiving, until her feelings burst all bounds, and she actually sobbed aloud. Julia leaned her head upon her brother’s shoulder, while her tears fell thick and fast upon his bosom. Grace alone was silent, and wept not like the rest.

They were a happy little party who sat beside Mrs. Falkland’s cheerful fire that evening, for they were happy in that peaceful solemn feeling, which, beyond all others, deserves the name of happiness. They were happy in knowing that evil was renounced, and good, at least, intended—happy in confidence restored, in affection valued, in trust held sacred, and in peace regained. If Grace Dalton looked less cheerful than the rest, it was only that she had a different way of showing her satisfaction; for none were more thankful than she was for the

resolution her cousin had made. Nor was he unconscious of her meaning, when she held his hand at parting for the night, and looked up into his face, and bid him such a kind good-night, as spoke the true language of affectionate regard. But there were also other proofs of her sympathy with his state of mind, with which none were acquainted.

It was her custom at all times to visit his chamber, as well as her aunt's and Julia's, before the hour of retiring to rest, to see that all things were ready for the night, and all their comforts separately and regularly provided for; though she never, on any occasion, neglected those of her cousin George, and would have done just as much for him when she knew he was transgressing the rules of propriety and decorum, as she did at other times; yet on this night she had taken a bible—a book she feared he too much neglected—and placed it on his dressing-table, in order that he might, if so disposed, strengthen his recent resolution, by studying its sacred and consolatory pages. George Falkland saw the strange volume, and supposed it had been his mother or his sister who had placed it there.

And now the hour of escape from observation arrived for poor Grace—the hour she was in the habit of calculating upon many times during the long day—the hour when she could shut the door of her chamber, and feel that she was alone—the hour when, if she could do nothing to serve the secretly beloved, she could at least pray for him. Bewildered with the confusion of images, which through this day had flitted before her; worn to a state of weariness, which left her no power to rest; distracted with the part she had been acting, sometimes false, and sometimes too sorrowfully true—she had a vague feeling, that by flying to her own room, and casting herself upon



her knees, she should be able, as on other weary nights, to throw off some of the burden of her soul. What then was the agony of her mind, when, after assuming this attitude, the thought suddenly flashed across her brain, that she had no longer any one to pray for—that *his* doom was now sealed for ever—that neither tears nor supplications could now be availing for *him*.

How little do they understand of true loveliness, who have never known this state! Grace arose from the ground appalled with a fresh sense of her situation; and wringing her hands with a burst of uncontrollable agony, would at that moment have freely suffered every torture that human nature is capable of sustaining, to have called him back but for one hour of repentance.

It was not long, however, before this bitter agony gave place to feelings of a softer nature; and recollecting the solemn event which had that evening bound together, as by fresh ties, the family with whom she was so intimately connected, she knelt down again, and prayed for her aunt, who had always been to her as a mother, for her cousins, but most of all for George, that he might be enabled to maintain his purpose; and then she turned to the solitary father in his lonely home: and so, after a long time, she rose up comforted, and, walking to her window, which commanded a view of the village, she looked out, and saw that a dim light was still burning in the old man's window.

"How could I be so wicked?" said she. "There is always some one left to pray for; and, perhaps, this old man has no interest in any other prayers than mine."

The following morning Grace Dalton was able to put in practice a plan she had formed for visiting the father of the deceased, without appearing designedly to obtrude herself upon his notice; and in this she obtained the full

approbation of her aunt, who was extremely anxious to adopt some mode of expressing her sympathy with the bereaved parent. He was, however, so little known to any one, so reserved and inaccessible in his own character, that this was an object of no easy attainment; and had not Grace been a more than commonly willing messenger, and so meek, besides, as not to shrink from the probability of meeting with a repulse, Mrs. Falkland's intended kindness would never have been carried into effect.

There were many considerations now to be entered into with regard to the funeral, in which female aid was not altogether out of place; and Grace began, by consulting with the servant, and occasionally sending messages to the master, which he answered promptly, and without evincing anything like displeasure, but rather as if relieved from a burden, by others having taken this affair upon themselves. Grace had imagined it would be so, for she possessed that kind of intuitive insight into character, which a naturally strong power of sympathy affords, and which is, perhaps, more serviceable, in the common events of life, than talents of a higher and more distinguished order.

Thus, before the day of the funeral arrived, Grace Dalton had become a sort of authorized assistant in the melancholy preparations; and retiring and modest as was her general bearing, her aunt and cousins were surprised to find the tact and skill with which she contrived to manage these affairs, without appearing to manage them at all. Mrs. Falkland and her daughter had both made the same experiment, and had both failed. They were too much of fine ladies to suit the taste of such a man as Kennedy; and, besides, they were now too happy to sympathize with him in reality, though they spoke fluently and well in the language of condolence. Grace, on the contrary, seldom





T. Allon.

G. Jackson.

*It was the hour of good separation.*

uttered an expression which could lead the reserved and solitary man to think that he himself was the subject of her observations. He only noticed that she took a part in the preparations for the funeral ; and he thought it was quite right for those who had a taste for such things, to take them into their own hands.

And now the morning of that day had come, and all things were in readiness ; and Grace Dalton felt that her melancholy task was done ; for what right had she to take part in the mourning ? what right had she even to be seen to weep ? for what were the Kennedys to her ?

While she was occupied, while she trod with gentle step about the house, and felt that she had an errand or duty there, she was comparatively happy. She could even pass the door of that silent room, though she had done this as seldom as possible ; but now that all was ready, that the grave claimed its own, and the sacred charge must be resigned, she felt a strange sinking of the soul, a sense of forlornness in her unpitied grief, under which her spirit failed ; and having occasion to follow the servant into the room where the father sat alone beside the closed coffin, she lingered there a moment, to see if she might not be permitted, though silently, to mingle her sorrow with his.

“ Is all ready, child ? ” said the old man, in a voice at once so gentle and subdued, that Grace was encouraged to approach nearer ; and after answering his question, she bent her head upon the coffin, and gave way to her tears.

It was the hour of final separation. Both felt it to be so ; and the old man sat at the head of the coffin, his hands clasped together, as if their firmly-knit grasp gave him strength to bear his affliction ; while the gentler

form of the orphan girl was bowed as if with mortal anguish. And there she wept, as if her heart was breaking; and the father was too deeply wrapped in thought to ask what right she had to grieve. Sad and solemn were the moments which the two mourners thus spent together. They were too soon interrupted; and old Kennedy rose from his chair to meet the strangers who came to perform their appointed office. He rose from his chair, and motioned for them to proceed with their duty; but his knees shook beneath him, and he dashed his hand across his brow as if to clear his vision, or to sweep away some image that still lingered before his sight. He soon recovered himself, however, and with no arm to lean upon, no near relative to wear so much as the outward garb of woe, he walked after the coffin to the place of burial, and stood with his head uncovered during the solemn service beside the last home of his only child.

There were many there who pitied the lonely father; many who would willingly have followed him to his desolate home, and shown him the common sympathy of neighbours and friends; but his manner drew no one near him, and he had failed, either intentionally or inadvertently, to request that any invitations should be given to his house. He therefore returned from the grave as he had gone—alone; and walking directly to his own door, entered his chamber without exchanging a single word with any individual. Even Grace had now no plea for remaining; and he passed her so hastily when by chance they met, that she could not but understand his wish to be left entirely alone.

The next day, however, she found, or made, an excuse for calling at the house; and not having been able to

accomplish this before the evening, she was agreeably surprised to find that her appearance had not only been expected, but wished for.

"I thought you long in coming," said old Kennedy, perhaps unconscious himself how much he was the creature of habit, and how the quiet step, and gentle voice, and willing hand of Grace Dalton had in reality won upon his heart.

Simple as were these few words, they had a powerful effect upon the orphan girl, who felt that a way was now opened for the kindness she had found it so difficult to express. Nor did she, as many would have done, defeat her own purpose by expressing too much. She even went away that evening at an early hour, and evidently before the old man was expecting to hear her kind good-night.

The next morning Grace was the bearer of a present from her aunt; and so she went on, stealing upon the heart of the solitary, until he began to converse with her perhaps more freely than he had done with any one for many years of his life. Grace had observed, that for some time he had been busily arranging his books and papers; she had observed also, that he was always at home; and she was not surprised to learn that he had resigned the situation, which, but for the sake of his son, he would never have held so long.

"My wants will now be so few," said he, "that it would ill repay me to be spending the little time that is left me on this side the grave, in toiling for myself."

Yet how to pass the time when no longer stimulated to exertion, was to him a far greater difficulty than he had apprehended; and, like many others similarly circumstanced, the lengthened hours of his aimless existence

were often filled with murmuring and discontent. Even common kindness, from whatever hand it came, with the exception of that of Grace Dalton, was scarcely received with gratitude.

"I cannot tell," said he to Grace one day, "why Mrs. Falkland thinks I have more relish for dainties since the death of my son, than I had before. She never sent me these delicacies when he was living, and might have shared them with me."

"It is the only means she has of showing you her kind feeling," observed Grace.

"And why does she wish to show it? Is it not enough to feel kindly, without telling others that you do so?"

"But you know, dear sir, that sympathy is nothing, if locked within one's own bosom.

"Don't talk to me of sympathy. I am weary of the word. I suppose they call it sympathy when they come here and talk to me with long faces and fine-spun words; and before they have gone fifty yards from the house, I hear them laughing on the other side of the hedge. No, no, child, I know what sorrow is. I have seen a good deal of it in my time; and I know it is what few people feel much of, except for themselves. Perhaps I ought hardly to say so either, for I remember how you wept on the day my poor boy was buried, and that could not have been for yourself—for what was he to you? Ah! my child, I remember those tears. They were more to me than volumes of fine words."

It was not always, however, that Kennedy spoke thus to Grace. He was sometimes harsh even to her, for it was his nature to be so; and those who speak of great afflictions, or even of great events of any kind, wholly changing the tone and bias of natural feeling, know little



of that nature of which they speak. There is but one change from which we have a right to anticipate any radical or lasting result, and even that leaves the same tone and bias to be striven against so long as life remains.

Still it was soothing and pleasant to that solitary and friendless man to have the orphan girl so near him, though, why she came so often, and lingered so long about him, he was wholly at a loss to imagine. She herself scarcely knew the nature of her own feelings. That she loved him for his own sake, was scarcely to be supposed; and yet she did love him with a strange kind of tenderness, which made her long to call him father; and one day, when they sat together in the sunshine at his door, and his manner was more than usually cordial, she looked up into his face, and ventured to ask him if she might call him father. But a cloud immediately settled upon his features, and he answered in words which poor Grace was never able to forget.

“No, no, child. You are going too far now. That I like you to come here, I will not deny; and that you sometimes while away the long hours, and make my life less weary, I can say with truth; but that any other voice than *his* should call me father, is a thing that cannot be. No, no. When you have known what I have known, you will understand how nature has her broken cords, which it would be a poor mockery to pretend to tie again. No, no. I have been a parent, and I have heard the cherub-voice of infancy lisping the name of father. As time rolled on, I have listened to the same sound, until it swelled into more meaning, and sunk into my soul, filling all its vacant chambers with the melody of love. Yes, morning after morning, I have been aroused from

slumber, when the early birds had scarce begun their song, by the fond and playful touch of my own, my only child. And now these things come back to me in my desolate old age, and I cannot—no, I must not let you call me father.”

“Forgive me,” said Grace, with a voice that could scarcely articulate, “forgive me. I am an orphan. I never knew what it was to use the name of father, or of mother.”

“Poor child !” said Kennedy ; and he took her hand, and drew her so near him, that she ventured for the first time to lean her head upon his shoulder, and weep.

In the mean-time, all was peace and joy in the habitation of Mrs. Falkland. It was frequently observed of the good lady herself, that her youth had returned with all its freshness and vigour ; for her cheek now bloomed with health, and her step was light and active, as in by-gone days. It was impossible for her son not to notice this change, or to deem it otherwise than cheaply purchased by the sacrifice he had made. Not that he ever estimated very highly the mere personal gratifications he had now given up ; the sacrifice was, in the position he had held amongst a certain class of society, who now looked upon him as a sort of traitor to the pledge of good-fellowship which his previous conduct had implied. Nothing was said to him on the subject, for there was a dignity and determination about George Falkland, which effectually repelled familiarity, whenever it was his wish to do so ; but his presence became evidently an intrusion amongst his former friends, diffusing over every countenance a silent gloom, like that which would naturally be produced by the entrance of a suspected person into a secret council. He was, in short, considered as a sort of

spy upon their actions, and such being the general feeling towards him, it became less difficult to withdraw himself entirely from their society.

Still there were some who entertained for George Falkland more than the common regard of mere acquaintanceship, and who felt a sincere regret to lose from their social circle a companion whose position in society, whose talents, and gentlemanly manners, alike combined to render him a valuable acquisition to whatever class he might attach himself.

With these friends it was a real difficulty to Falkland to maintain the ground he had so recently, and, in their opinion, so unreasonably taken.

"Why should you think so much," they used to say, "of that luckless Kennedy? He was a low fellow, after all, and if he was drowned by the rising of the tide, it has only made us all the wiser, by teaching us not to ride home by the beach when we have been out to dine."

To these remarks George Falkland would sometimes reply with a visible shudder; for, as he told his cousin Grace, he never afterwards could rise from the dinner-table without realizing again the grasp of that clenched hand, when the last hold of the drowning man was upon him.

There was one family in particular, with whom George Falkland always found it difficult to adhere strictly to the resolution he had formed; and on one memorable day, he had just begun to think, that as more than a year had passed since the death of poor Kennedy, he might surely satisfy his friends by remaining with them at least an hour beyond his usual time. He had even filled his glass again, on the strength of this determination, when his better feelings gained the mastery, and he rose

suddenly from the table, and wished the party good-night.

It was a fine moonlight evening in October, when he rode slowly along his lonely way, too happy to accelerate his speed, in the thought that he had escaped, though narrowly, from breaking his solemn vow. Wrapped in these reflections, and the many thoughts to which they gave rise, he was suddenly startled by the sound of a carriage advancing with unusual rapidity towards him; and, drawing up his horse to listen, he heard the clatter of horses' hoofs at full gallop. His next impulse was to alight, and it was well that he did so, for in a few seconds the carriage was before him, and it was only by the steadiness of his eye and hand, that he was enabled to lay hold of the rein of the affrighted animal, and arrest its furious course.

"My father!" cried a feeble voice at that instant, and Falkland then saw for the first time the figure of a female in the carriage, who implored him, with all the strength she retained, to assist her to go back in search of her father. With difficulty, however, could she make herself understood; and such was the agitation under which she laboured, that her simple story was long in being told. It was no other than this, that her father having got out of the carriage to adjust the rein, while thus engaged, the horse had suddenly started off, and, as she believed, had dragged the carriage over him; and with astonishing presence of mind, she had remained perfectly quiet, while the horse was going at its utmost speed. Had Falkland been a few minutes later, a sudden turn in the road, with a steep descent on one side, would probably have terminated her existence; while, had his eye been less steady, or his hand less firm,

he might never have been able to stop the terrified animal, and thus to rescue from an awful death, the gentle being who now leaned upon his arm, and urged him to go faster, and faster still, though her own strength was scarcely able to support her to the spot where she believed her father to be laid.

What, then, was her astonishment, to see his well-known figure hastening towards her, evidently in the possession of his accustomed health and strength. The consequence was a very natural one. Her reason, which had withstood the shock of terror and distress, gave way under that of unexpected joy, and the daughter sank senseless into the arms of her parent.

The following morning found both the strangers welcome visitors beneath the roof of Mrs. Falkland. Miss Cameron, for that was the young lady's name, was sufficiently recovered to know that her father was safe, and by degrees the whole came back to her recollection, and she talked and smiled with the rest of the family, at the providential meeting between her and George Falkland, who did not fail to recall, in his own mind, the temptation he had been under to remain an hour longer with his friends, by which means he would not only have broken a promise now kept inviolate for more than twelve months, but would have lost the opportunity of saving the precious life of a being, who struck his youthful fancy as the loveliest he had ever beheld.

Mr. and Miss Cameron were well known in the neighbourhood, but it so happened that they never had been introduced to the Falklands before. Their meeting now was of a kind to make their acquaintance more intimate than years of common visiting could have rendered it; and the first awakening of kind interest to

which an awful and alarming event had given rise, was followed by a frequency of intercourse, in which George Falkland considered himself richly rewarded for the few instances of self-denial in which his natural inclination had been crossed; but most of all, for that particular instance which had been the means of introducing him to the society of Miss Cameron.

But why prolong a story of love, which all understand, though few know how to speak of? Suffice it, that not twelve months after this event, the bells of the village church were ringing merrily one fine evening in July, and Mrs. Falkland and her family were all in readiness to welcome home the heir of her house and name, with his beautiful bride, once Miss Cameron, after their marriage tour. And not the inmates of his mother's establishment only, were expected to rejoice, for there were tables spread upon the lawn, and rustic seats made ready, and Grace Dalton was passing from one to another, placing the crowning dish of plenty on the board, and arranging the accommodation of all, even the poorest and the meanest of her neighbours from the village.

At last the sound of carriages was heard. The gates were thrown open, and the happy travellers looked out, and saw what a welcome awaited them. Nor were they too fastidious to despise the rural minstrelsy of that humble place. A band of village musicians struck up a lively air. A troop of children then came hand in hand, after them their parents, followed by the young men and maidens of the village, and took their places at the tables under the spreading trees, with the green turf for their carpet, and the cloudless skies for their canopy.

Those who argue that there is no social enjoyment

without strong stimulus, might have been defeated in their theory that night. Whether it was the want of taste in the inhabitants of that obscure village, or their folly in being so easily contented, we will not pretend to say ; but, certainly, there was no lack of harmless mirth, of happy faces, of laughter and good-fellowship, that night.

Perhaps Grace Dalton was the most serious of any in the company ; yet she moved from one cheerful group to another, bestowing her kindest attentions upon the poorest and the humblest individuals there, with a sweet satisfaction in her countenance, which spoke the language of hospitality, as eloquently as the most lively joy. She even went so far as to join in the games of the children, just to set them the more at ease ; but no sooner did she see them thoroughly emancipated from restraint, than she withdrew to some quieter group, or stole away to a shady spot amongst the trees, where she might stand still for a moment, and look on, without being seen.

And now as daylight was departing, and the shadows grew dark beneath the trees, thousands of coloured lamps suspended from their branches, burst forth into dazzling light ; while a display of fire-works, of which none of the company had been apprised, threw their splendid stars into the sky.

There was no longer any need for Grace to exercise her ingenuity in entertaining the company, or setting them at ease. She was now liberated from all duties of that description, and, turning into a shady walk, she indulged herself with the luxury of believing she was alone. What then was her surprise, to see the figure of old Kennedy leaning upon his staff !

With the privilege of a child, to which he appeared to

consider her entitled, she went and stood still beside him ; for she knew his temperament too well to break upon his silent moods by addressing him abruptly.

"They seem very happy," said the old man. I told you that I would not come, for I thought I could not bear it. But as I sat alone in the twilight, it rushed into my mind that I would just come and see how it might have been with *him*—if—if—" and he dashed a tear from his eye, while his words seemed to choke him in the utterance.

"Ay, there they are," said he, after a long pause. "There is the bridal party come out. See how graciously they go from one table to another ; and, hark ! what is that which George Falkland is telling them ?"

They both listened ; and as the gay and happy party approached nearer, they could distinctly hear George Falkland bid them all welcome, and receive their good wishes in return.

"I have not treated you with the usual kind of hospitality," said he. "I have given you nothing to excite your mirth, but I hope you have not been the less happy. I cannot for my own part forget, and I am sure you would not wish me to forget to-night, that had I, on one occasion, staid one hour later at table, or even taken one glass more, I should not only never have known the happiness of calling this lady my wife, but in all human probability she would never have seen the light of another day."

"Yes, child," said Kennedy again, as if the train of his thoughts had scarcely been interrupted, "such might have been *his* situation. And you, Grace Dalton, might have been leaning on his arm like yon happy bride. But what have I said, my child ? and why do you weep as you did on the day of the funeral ?"

"Because I loved your son."



“ You loved him !”

“ Yes. And he loved me—at least, he told me so.”

“ Then come to my bosom,” said the old man, opening his arms, “ and you shall be my child indeed, and I will be your father. Now, now I understand you. Yes, lean on this withered bosom ; there is warmth in it yet. Sweet as an angel’s visits have been thine to me ; but from this hour let us never part again.”

And it was so, that Grace became an inmate in the humble abode of the old man, and dwelt with him until his dying day ; and sweet and salutary was the influence her mild and chastened spirit exerted over him. The arguments of a more powerful reason, his morbid mind would, in all probability, have repelled ; but the persevering solicitude of a meek and quiet spirit, few can resist.

The little property which Kennedy had possessed, he bequeathed to Grace Dalton at his death. When that event took place, she put on mourning as if she had been his child ; and perhaps few parents are followed to the grave with sorrow more sincere, than was her’s for her adopted father.

## CHAP. XI.

## THE FAVOURITE CHILD.

It happens in many families, though rarely acknowledged by the parties concerned, that there is a favourite child ; and what appears still more remarkable in such cases is, that the brothers and sisters of such children are sometimes so far influenced by the example of their parents, as willingly to contribute a more than just share even of their own favour and indulgence to the same object of tenderness and solicitude.

Thus it was in the family of Mrs. Vining, the widow of a wealthy merchant, whose youngest daughter, Isabel, had been born after her father's death. Whether from this circumstance, or from the extremely delicate constitution of the child, she became, from her earliest infancy, an object of intense interest and anxiety to her devoted mother, at the same time that she was most injudiciously made the pet and the plaything of the rest of the household. Nor was this the case with the servants alone, who might well be supposed to find their own interest in pampering her tastes, and humouring her wishes ; but even with her brothers and sisters, she became also a sort of privileged being ; and never was her infant voice on any occasion raised to the pitch of anger or distress, but succour and soothing were immediately brought from every quarter of the house ; while the mother, incredulous as to the existence of any taint of evil in so sacred a mould, always persisted in believing that the child must have been a sufferer in one way or another ; and woe to any offender on whom her suspicions fell !

In this manner the little Isabel advanced along the path of life, with feeble and uncertain steps; for, in addition to her constitutional delicacy, she had to contend with a will undisciplined, and with endless longings after personal gratification unchecked, unregulated, and consequently incapable of being gratified to their full extent.

It was no wonder that, under such circumstances, her mind, by nature more than commonly susceptible, received a melancholy bias, which never afterwards was overcome; for while her brothers and sisters were happy in their play, some fancied injury, some real disappointment, or some actual pain, would send her fretting to the side of her mother, to receive the never-failing caress, to lean her head upon her lap, and to wear away the remainder of the evening in a sort of vague and pensive musing, which often terminated in floods of causeless tears.

In what manner Mrs. Vining expected her daughter would be able to meet and combat with the difficulties of life, no one could imagine; and many were the sage exclamations of those visitors who administered bon-bons and flattery to the little darling, and went away, lifting up their hands with equal wonder and disapprobation at the blindness and folly of such a mother.

After all, poor Isabel grew up to be a more tolerable sort of girl than might have been expected. In spite of her natural share of selfishness, which had been so effectually fostered and cultivated, there was something winning in her looks and manners; and on the few occasions when she had been roused into acting for, and by herself, she had shown herself capable of high moral feeling.

These occasions, however, had been extremely rare, for the greater portion of her life was spent in a kind of dreamy idleness, from which she was seldom roused,

except by some awakening desire for personal gratification, some complaint of mental or bodily uneasiness, or some scheme for momentary amusement, which she was generally too languid or too indolent to carry into effect.

The consequence of all this was, that Isabel Vining arrived at the age of eighteen, a victim to dyspepsia, an amateur in medicine, a martyr to nervous maladies, and as elegantly discontented with life and all it had to offer, as any other young lady of her age could think becoming to her character and station. The worst of all was, that by this system of injudicious treatment, false tastes had been created, unnatural cravings excited for bodily as well as mental stimulants, which, under the names of cordials, tonics, and restoratives, were but too plentifully supplied.

Isabel had not, like her sisters, been permitted to go to school, though hers was a case in which school discipline might have been highly efficacious; she had not even been considered capable of enduring the usual process of mental instruction at home. Thus her education, even that inferior part which relates to the understanding and the memory, was as vague and irregular as could well be imagined. She was, however, an extensive, though superficial reader; and those who conversed with her only for a short time, believed her to be a much better informed person than she really was.

We have said, that with all her disadvantages, Isabel was not absolutely disagreeable. So far from this, she generally attracted attention in company, by her easy and ladylike manners, and by a countenance which, perhaps, was less beautiful than interesting and expressive. Unassailed by any of those severe trials which put to the test the real principles upon which we act, she had not

made the discovery herself, nor had any of her friends made it for her, that she was in reality selfish and unamiable ; for while every one ministered to her gratification, she had only to express her gratitude, affect a little willingness to deny herself, and expatiate on her regret at being the cause of so much trouble, and all went on exactly as she wished—the trouble was incurred, the attempted self-denial was frustrated, and the kindness for which she expressed her gratitude was repeated and increased.

What a lesson do we learn by a sudden reverse of this order of things ! —a lesson, perhaps the most severe that experience ever teaches ; while at the same time our dependence upon animal and selfish gratification, our irritability, impatience, and wounded feeling, when these are denied, show us but too faithfully the living picture of those passions of which we believed ourselves incapable, simply because indulgence had hitherto lulled them to rest.

It was a fact by no means overlooked by the friends of Mrs. Vining, that while her daughter Isabel attracted more attention than her sisters, they were all respectably married before any one had ventured to make the same kind of proposal to her. It is said that every one, soon or late, however, has her chance : her's came at last ; and the proposal was from a spruce middle-aged man of business, who was looking out for a second wife.

“ Astonishing ! ” exclaimed every one who heard of it. They would probably have been less surprised, had they known that Mr. Ainsworth was intimately acquainted with Mrs. Vining's lawyer, who had assured him that the youngest daughter would have a double portion on her marriage, as well as another portion by no means incon-

siderable at her mother's death. Their astonishment might also have been lessened, had they known that the spruce gentleman was simply in search of a wife, whose dowry might assist him in some speculations he was about to make; and that, had Isabel Vining been from home, or indisposed, or otherwise unable to see him precisely at that time, he was not unprovided with other names on his list of eligible connexions.

It happened, perhaps unfortunately for her, that she was in better health and spirits than usual, and that the mother was looking older, and altogether more like breaking-up, than Mr. Ainsworth had expected, when he made his formal visit, the purport of which, for the present, was explained to the mother alone.

Mrs. Vining had long been solicitous for her daughter's settlement in life. She knew that her own health was failing, and that Isabel must soon be left alone. Money, of itself, she was aware would not secure to her favourite that solicitude and tender care to which she had been accustomed; and, consequently, she was the more anxious to commit her happiness to the keeping of one who would feel a personal interest in preserving it. Mr. Ainsworth was not all she could have wished, but in some respects he was preferable to a younger man. He had the advantage of having been tried in the married state, and was said to have been an excellent husband. He had daughters too, who were extremely active, and fond of domestic affairs, so that all such burdens would be taken off the hands of the young wife; and no doubt, if they were at all kind-hearted, they would esteem it a privilege to nurse her, and care for her, as she had been accustomed to be nursed and cared for beneath her mother's roof. At all events, Mr. Ainsworth assured her

they would. From his account, they were the cleverest girls in the world, able to make all manner of good things; and he told with triumph of their jellies, and their cakes, their nostrums, and their cordials, until the mother's ears tingled with the tidings of what was in store for her beloved child.

Nothing, however, could induce this "child," who had now arrived at the age of eight-and-twenty without having once been thwarted in her will, to leave her mother's roof, or, in other words, to exchange a certain, for an uncertain good; and so much time was lost by the anxious lover in gaining favour with the mother alone, that he began to think how, in the meridian of this favour, he could make an honourable retreat—when the death of Mrs. Vining suddenly changed the whole aspect of affairs, plunging the unhappy daughter into a state of distress too absorbing for any one to share, or perhaps to wish to share with her.

Days and weeks—nay, even months—passed over, and Isabel found no consolation except in the attentions of a favourite servant, to whose care her mother had committed her, and who knew but too well how to administer restoratives to her sinking frame.

At last, however, the mourner began to be weary of her own grief, to wish for some change, and to think it rather odd that no one came to comfort her. She had no person in particular to blame, for her brothers and sisters wrote her kind letters, and paid her periodical visits; but she had actually gone so far as to succeed at last in persuading herself that the whole world was ungenerous to take so little notice of her grief, when one day, as she looked with a listless, dreamy gaze from the window of her parlour, she saw the figure of Mr. Ainsworth, more

brisk and spruce than ever, stepping across the street to the door of her house.

Unconsciously, Isabel actually ran up stairs to her own room, a thing she had never been known to do since the days of her childhood—looked in the glass, adjusted her hair, and wondered whether mourning was as becoming to her as colours.

It is scarcely necessary to say more as to the result of Mr. Ainsworth's visit. Loneliness, loss of personal kindness, and the recent rupture of the bonds of kindred and affection, go farther than all personal attractions, to recommend the suitor who arrives under the auspicious influence of such circumstances. The consequences, therefore, were, that after the expiration of the usual term allotted for filial grief, Isabel Vining was led to the altar as a bride.

Mr. Ainsworth was an active, healthy, fair complexioned man, who looked much younger than he really was. He had small regular features, rather pretty than handsome, with quick, serviceable-looking eyes, that seemed to be constantly employed in finding out how much everything they took note of would fetch in the market. Even on his wedding tour, which, as usual, made the circuit of the lakes, he had so many wordy battles with innkeepers and postilions, that Isabel began at last to wish she was at the end of her journey, in order to be released from this perpetual conflict. She did not then know that her bridegroom was far more in his element when obtaining anything he wanted at less than its real value, than in listening to her sentimental remarks, as they sauntered by the side of some grassy lake. This was nothing but child's play to Mr. Ainsworth—that was doing business.



The honey-moon came at last to its conclusion, and the bridal party reached their residence in town. The aspect of Mr. Ainsworth's house was respectable, and somewhat imposing; and the bride felt well pleased to think that here she would find a home. The season was late in the autumn, and it was long after the close of day that she was first ushered into her husband's drawing-room. The impression was most favourable. Two well-dressed daughters received her with the utmost propriety; a handsome tea-equipage stood upon the table, and there were sundry preparations for something like a supper, in case the travellers should have dined early, or not have dined at all.

"I am sure I shall like all this extremely," said Isabel to herself, as she looked around upon her new home. "Draw round that sofa to the fire, give me a novel I have never read, and I shall be as happy as a queen."

Nor were the preparations in her chamber, or her dressing-room, less complete. Everything, in short, had been arranged in a style of modern elegance, far superior to that of her mother's ancient, but comfortable home. There wanted nothing but a larger fire in her dressing-room. Her favourite servant, who, of course, had accompanied her, declared she could have held the whole between her finger and thumb. All else, however, was well, and Isabel went to sleep with a pleasant picture floating before her mental vision, of the handsome drawing-room, the carpets, the curtains, the tea-equipage, and all the discoveries she hoped to make on the morrow, of treasures undisplayed, of which she could not but suppose a wealthier mine was yet behind the scenes.

On the following morning, the bride having break-

fasted, as she always did, in her own room, descended at a late hour to join, as she supposed, the family circle; when, what was her astonishment on opening the door of the drawing-room, to find it unoccupied, and without a fire. The aspect of things too, was so entirely changed, that it was difficult to believe it to be the same apartment. Of the moveable ornaments, none were left; covers were drawn over the damask chairs and sofas; while calico sheets had been pinned up to protect the curtains, and one of larger dimensions spread upon the carpet on the floor.

Never did the silent fall of fresh deep snow look colder to the traveller on first peeping out of his inn-window, than did the aspect of this apartment to the wondering bride. She turned away from the door, but knew not where to go, when her own maid appeared in time to relieve her difficulty.

There had been a meaning smile on the lips of this Abigail all the morning—not a smile of absolute pleasure, but rather a smile of discovery, as if the gratification of having found things out, almost repaid her for having found them not altogether agreeable; and had not her mistress, from an habitual dread of the consequences of this smile, scrupulously avoided asking any questions, the mysteries of Mr. Ainsworth's menage might have been painted in pretty strong colours, even at this early stage of their developement.

"The fire, ma'am, is in the dining-room to-day, such as it is," said Betsy; and she led the way down stairs, and threw open the door of a large and scantily-furnished room, where a homely carpet, of considerably smaller dimensions, left a border of bare boards all around it.

Isabel's heart sank within her. An old-fashioned

mahogany table stood in the middle of the room; a side-board at one end; the chairs were all in their places close up against the wall, and there was neither ottoman, sofa, nor stuffed arm-chair. The fire-place, that centre of attraction, which can send forth its welcome or its repulse as well as the most expressive human countenance—the fire-place was a little pinched-up, shallow receptacle, that would scarcely hold cinders enough to warm a bed. Betsy placed a seat beside it for her mistress. Neither of them spoke a word; and the maid, after inventing many excuses for remaining in the room, was compelled at last to take her departure, without having relieved her mind of its accumulating load.

Miss Ainsworth next made her appearance in due form. She was plainly dressed, had the pockets of her apron filled with keys, and looked extremely busy; but she sat down for a few minutes, evidently intent upon making herself agreeable. Isabel was too indolent, and therefore she was often considered too reserved, to converse, except when under the influence of mental or bodily stimulus; and Miss Ainsworth, having discovered an unusual accumulation of dust upon the mantel-piece, was glad to make it an excuse for going out to scold the servant.

Poor Isabel! the blank desolation of that long morning was such, that she could not even betake herself to tears: she was, in fact, too much confounded—too much appalled by her situation altogether; and she remained in the same position, fixed in a kind of stupor, until Betsy came back to ask her what she would like to take.

“What is there?” she asked of Betsy in her turn.

“Why, ma’am,” replied the maid, “that is more than I can tell you. There’s the cold chicken, but Miss

Ainsworth has got hold of that for dinner. And there's a few slices of ham that was left last night, and some cold apple-pie. But whatever there is, it is locked up, and Miss Ainsworth has the key."

"You have nothing to do," said Isabel, "but tell her that you want to prepare me my luncheon; and bring me some wine as soon as you can, for I am dreadfully faint."

Miss Ainsworth, who was in reality a very reasonable sort of person, had no idea whatever of keeping anything locked up from the now rightful mistress of the house. She came therefore on the first summons, to offer up the keys of office, and to request that Mrs. Ainsworth would freely express her wishes, whatever they might be. Isabel, however, was too indolent to take charge of the keys, and she replied by simply asking for something to eat—"the merest trifle in the world."

"I dare say you feel fatigued with your journey," observed Miss Ainsworth, "or I should hardly recommend your taking anything before dinner. We always think it spoils the appetite."

"I will trouble you for a glass of wine then," said Isabel, somewhat pettishly.

Miss Ainsworth went to the sideboard, took out several decanters, dusted, and placed them on the table.

"Here is port," said she, "excellent cape wine, and our own raisin, and gooseberry."

"I never take any of them," said Isabel. "Have you neither sherry nor madeira?"

Miss Ainsworth looked a little surprised; but she found, without much difficulty, a decanter of sherry, and, pouring out half a glass, sat down, and waited until Mrs. Ainsworth had drank it; when she coolly asked

her to take more ; and on her refusal, locked all up again safely in the sideboard.

Isabel had never felt herself so strangely circumstanced before. She had nothing to complain of, and nobody to blame ; yet she hastened to her own room, and, covering her face with her hands, gave way to a long and violent fit of weeping.

Mr. Ainsworth, the happy bridegroom, was all this while busy in his counting-house in the city, being eager, after so long an absence, to redeem the lost time ; nor was it without considerable difficulty that he tore himself away from invoices, receipts, and bales of goods, half an hour earlier than his usual time for returning home to dinner. He was a little surprised to find his bride in tears ; but on second thoughts, this fact was easily accounted for, by his own protracted absence ; and finding, after many apologies for the necessity of personal attention to his affairs in town, that she made an effort to put away her grief, he was the more confirmed in the flattering conclusions at which he had arrived. His own kindness, he thought, to say nothing of the approaching dinner, would set all right ; and he descended, at the welcome sound of the bell, with the gentle Isabel leaning on his arm.

The first circumstance which struck the attention of the bride on casting a hasty glance over the table, was, that all the silver forks had been taken away, and that most of the other valuables, which had figured on the table the previous evening, had been removed ; while a few old spoons, evidently of distant relationship, and two or three solitary cruets, remained in their stead. The dinner itself was a very nice, but a very small one ; and Isabel could have fared tolerably well, had her usual

portion of porter or strong beer been placed beside her; but it is rather an awkward thing in so small a party, that every word can be heard, and especially if that party are water-drinkers only, for a delicate lady to ask for porter, and still worse for ale. Isabel had not the nerve to make this demand for herself, and nobody invited her to take more than a single glass of wine after the cloth had been removed.

Of course, she was peevish and fretful for the remainder of the evening; and so absorbed in self, as only to be reminded by some casual remark, that Mr. Ainsworth had a third daughter, an invalid, who never left her room. It immediately struck her as being high time her maternal duties should be so far fulfilled as to make the acquaintance, at least, of this young sufferer, who, at the age of thirteen, was confined to her own apartment by hopeless and incurable lameness.

To this apartment, therefore, Isabel requested to be conducted, and she found there a poor, sickly girl, pale and emaciated, whose temper was said to be so irritable, that she had been consigned almost entirely to the care of servants. "Nobody could do anything with her," was the frequent remark of her sisters, and Isabel began to think it was but too just; for neither on this, nor many other visits of duty which she afterwards made to the sick chamber, could she succeed in attaining the least advance towards intimacy with its afflicted occupant. She tried sympathy, but the child looked at her with a vacant stare; she tried conversation, but scarcely elicited an answer in return; she tried presents, but they were received with evident suspicion, and something like contempt. "Perhaps," said Isabel to herself, "it is imbecility of mind. Perhaps the child is an idiot as well

as a cripple, and they have concealed this fact from me."

Unaccustomed as she was to pursue any course of action where difficulties lay in her way, the matter was soon given up, and this the more readily, that her own affairs were beginning to assume a very serious and alarming character.

Isabel was one of those interesting ladies who have a sort of romantic pride in never taking care of themselves. Perhaps we ought rather to say, she was too great an epicure in pleasure, to lay hold of, or secure it for herself. Her's was the true luxury of enjoyment, for it was the enjoyment of having all her wishes consulted and indulged without any effort of her own; and hitherto her system had succeeded to admiration. She had even ventured upon it so far as not to have any portion of her property settled upon herself. It was so much more gratifying to have abundance perpetually pressed into her hand, than to have it secured to her by law. Mr. Ainsworth thought so too; and he proposed a plan of allowing her a weekly supply for her own expenditure, which to him appeared munificent, and even to her, almost enough. The fact was, she had no idea of the value of money. Everything had hitherto been obtained for her without the trouble of calculation on her part, and therefore she imagined the sum proposed would go at least ten times as far as it really did.

Mr. Ainsworth had the reputation of being an extremely good-natured man. In fact, he really was good natured; but it was only in proportion with the extent to which his own ends were facilitated in their accomplishment. Had these been more subject to failure, his reputation on the score of temper might have suffered

some abatement ; but the very equanimity of his deportment, the smooth, easy, and yet determined manner in which he transacted business, gave him a sort of mastery over more impetuous and turbulent spirits, which he was not slow to turn to his own account.

Every one has his besetting sin. Mr. Ainsworth's was the love of money—the love of gaining and keeping money, and, in addition to this, of having it known that he possessed it. The accomplishment of this last object, however, involved him in perpetual contradictions to his natural will. Yet it would little have answered his purpose to be rich, had no one known that he was so ; and he was consequently under the painful necessity of publishing this fact through the medium of good dinners, elaborately got up, and ostentatious displays of occasional hospitality, which he felt all the while strongly disposed to think cost him more than they were really worth. On all other occasions, his expenditure, and that of his family, was limited to the strictest economy. “Eat nothing, wear nothing, and buy nothing, that you can possibly do without,” was the ruling maxim of his life ; “and you will be gainers by it in the end,” was the no less frequent conclusion to this sage advice. Had he at the same time proposed to his family a motive worthy of their efforts, all might have tended to their real good. He had himself, however, no motive beyond that of accumulating wealth, and therefore he knew of none to propose to his children, higher, or more noble, than that of being “gainers in the end.”

Accustomed in early life to habits of unresisting obedience, active, industrious, and somewhat like her father in the bias of her mind, Miss Ainsworth had been easily trained up to fall in with all such domestic arrangements



as were most conducive to the one great end. On the death of her mother, which took place when she was little more than sixteen, she had been intrusted with the keys of office, and ever afterwards had found her element in what is called domestic management.

The reputation of Mr. Ainsworth's daughters, for their skill and industry in this department, was certainly well deserved. It was their father's highest praise, that they saved him the expense of at least one servant. They had recipes, and cheap methods for making everything that could be eaten, and doing everything that could be done. Nothing, therefore, was ever purchased in its manufactured state, which their hands could turn to proper use. For the raw material only, Mr. Ainsworth paid his money, and he had the advantage of their labour gratis. In proportion to this labour, was the care with which everything they made was preserved for its appointed purpose ; and, like the servants with whom they chiefly associated, they learned to believe the great end of domestic economy was to make a better display than their neighbours, on those grand occasions when their father invited his friends.

The bride, of course, had been witness to many of these displays soon after her marriage, and on these happy days, when guests polite and flattering had pressed her to take what was most agreeable, she had been in high good humour—even almost gay. It was when all was put away again, that discomfort and desolation seemed to stare her in the face. In vain she endeavoured to cope with these hitherto unknown enemies. The ingenuity of her maid threw some lights upon the scene.

Betsy had at last found an opening for the relief of her mind, in constant tale-bearing from the kitchen. She

had never seen such doings in all her life—"everything locked up—perfect starvation—the fire put out as soon as the cooking was done—salt butter, and sour beer! It might do for those who had been used to nothing better, but—" and such a concentration of contempt and indignation was embodied in this BUT, that the word seemed scarcely large enough to bear its own burden.

At the conclusion of one of these eloquent declamations, a plan was devised between the mistress and the maid to have their own little private store—just what was "absolutely necessary—what health, in short, required." Nor was Betsy slow in suggesting expedients for carrying this plan into effect. Their new order of things, however, was a little more expensive than either had expected, and for the remainder of the week they were decidedly short of money. The bride now found that her husband's allowance was not likely to prove sufficient; and how to remedy this inconvenience, was beyond even Betsy's powers of invention to devise.

Isabel had hitherto been a stranger to premeditated deception. She had feared no one, and therefore had had nothing to conceal. She could scarcely be said to fear any one now, yet there was a sort of obstinate method in the family, which defied all innovation; and though her request for any particular indulgence might not have been denied, it would have given rise to so much amazement, so much reasoning on its cause, and calculation as to its consequence, that something even more absolute than direct denial seemed to be placed in the way of her gratification. And thus it was that she became, under the teaching of her maid, an apt scholar in the first practice of deception.

It so happened that the Misses Ainsworth, so clever

in every branch of economy, wanted either time or talent to make their own dresses, and they consequently employed a young woman, who was so poor that she worked for them on the lowest possible terms. They were accustomed to say of her, "it was quite a charity to employ her, she worked for them so cheaply."

Isabel had been favourably struck with the appearance of this person, and, thinking she might aid in the accomplishment of one of her own little schemes, asked her one day for her address.

Maria, for that was her name, blushed deeply, and evaded the question. Isabel asked her again, when she turned to Betsy and said, "If your maid, ma'am, would like to call at my lodgings, I live at No. 3, — street, on the third story."

Isabel might easily have read in the countenance and manner of the girl, that this communication was made with great pain; but she was just then too intent upon her own affairs; and, bidding her maid write down the address, thought no more about the matter.

The important scheme which at that moment filled her mind, was the purchase of a dress which had pleased her fancy, and the possibility of having it made up by this young woman, and brought secretly to the house, without her husband or her daughters ever knowing that it had not been a part of her bridal equipment. Some weeks however, elapsed, before this plan could be carried into effect, owing to the demand upon her purse from other quarters, and during that time she heard nothing of the poor dressmaker.

It was one fine morning, after Mr. Ainsworth had set off on his usual walk to the city—a mode of passing to and fro which he adopted purely for the preservation of

his health—that Isabel and her maid sallied forth to visit some of the most fashionable shops in town. The identical fabric was at last found, but not without a little mortification experienced by both, to discover that it was at least double the price which had been anticipated—on the part of the mistress, because her weekly allowance was falling more and more short of her desires; and on the part of the maid, because this deficiency had lately been supplied in the form of loans from her own purse, to an extent which she began to look upon as rather serious, considering the situation of her mistress.

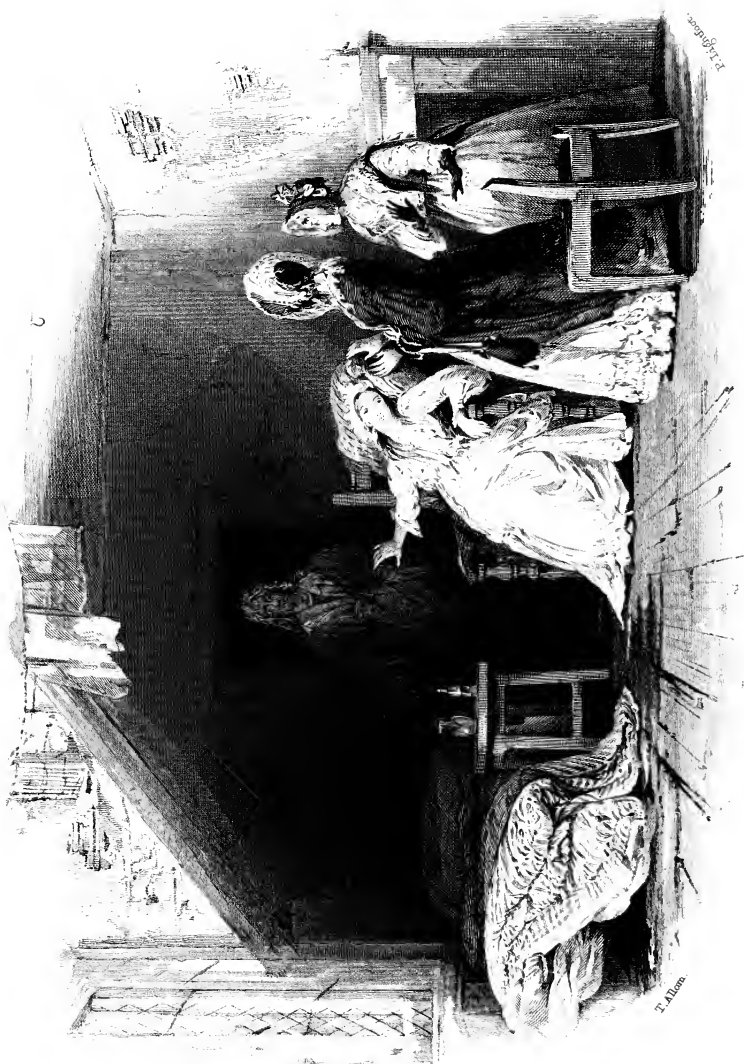
A new dress, however, was in her estimation so great a treasure, and afforded so cheering a hope of some former one being displaced, and converted to her own use, that she felt glad she had not, according to her first intention, purposely left her money at home for that morning.

With the dearly-bought treasure, then, they proceeded in search of the street to which Maria had directed them, and which, but for their ignorance of London, they would scarcely have had the resolution to enter. The house, too, was so little inviting, that they retreated from the door to look for some other No. 3, before they had the courage to knock. They did knock, however, at last, and it seemed to them, as the sound jarred upon their ears, that every inhabitant of that wretched street was looking upon them. A little dirty girl came to the door, and when they told her they wanted the dressmaker who lived on the third story, she tripped up stairs before them, evidently proud of pointing out the way to such illustrious guests.

The door of the third story was closed, and they knocked twice before a female voice answered from



*"It was the Mother of Maria."*



T. Agnew & Sons

T. Agnew

within, "Come in." They did so, and a scene presented itself which might have driven from a harder heart than Isabel's all satisfaction in having purchased an unnecessary dress. The miserable occupant of that dark chamber—the cheap dressmaker, whose daily and often nightly labour supplied her only means of subsistence, had been ill for three weeks ; so ill, that bundles of work, untouched, lay heaped upon a table by the small window, which looked out upon an interminable range of black chimneys and tiles. She sat in a low chair, evidently too feeble to rise, beside a fire-place which contained only a few cinders. Her bed, if such it might be called, was in disorder, for she had no strength to make it ; and there were traces of recent tumult and confusion in the room, which her helpless situation was altogether insufficient to account for. On discovering who were her visitors, a deep crimson spread itself over her face ; and, such was her weakness, confusion, and distress, that drops of perspiration were actually forced out upon her forehead.

With the kindness which, in a latent and inactive form, really belonged to her character, Isabel began to question the poor invalid as to the nature of her illness ; when, as if the tones of an unknown voice had roused some slumbering demon in the adjoining apartment, strange sounds, as horrible as they were strange to ears refined, again suffused the sufferer's face with crimson ; and looking round, she saw the door forced open by a spectacle, which, however familiar it might be to her, was worse than appalling to her guests.

It was the mother of Maria—an aged woman, who for many years had been the victim of intemperance, and whose constant cravings drained away the produce of her daughter's industry. In health and strength, Maria had

been able to conceal the wages of her labour from this woman's rapacity; but since her illness, every corner of the room had been searched, and even her own dress had that very morning been violently torn, to obtain the last shilling she possessed.

Attracted on the one hand by a strong sense of sympathy, repelled on the other by disgust and horror, Isabel remained as if rooted to the spot. She was unwilling to leave that helpless girl with her sufferings unrelieved; and yet there stood that frightful woman, grinning with distorted laughter, and beckoning to her as if to share the horrors of her den.

The mother of the young dressmaker had just sense enough to perceive the character of her daughter's guests, and consequently to make her accustomed demand for money, which, being promptly granted, partly through fear, and partly through disgust, she retreated to the inner apartment, leaving her daughter more at liberty to pursue her melancholy story. It was a short and simple one.

"Was your mother always addicted to these habits?" asked Isabel.

"Oh! no," replied Maria; "she was once the best of mothers; and as I grew up, we should have been able to do very well, but she married again, and her husband was a hard man, and stinted her of many things she had been used to. I believe he meant well, but they got to harsh words one against another, and so my mother took to drinking to drive away her grief, and then he left her. Indeed, no man could live with us, as we live now. My mother has had nothing for the last three days but gin; and I assure you, ma'am, I have not a penny, nor a morsel of bread in the house. I had been thinking



this morning, that if nobody came to help me, I should hardly live to see another day; and now I thank God for sending you, for I am sure there is goodness in your face."

"In what way can I help you most?" said Isabel.

"Why, ma'am, if I might make so bold—you see those heaps of work—it is a great thing to ask; but if I could hire a person for a week to do it for me, I should just keep my custom, and all would be well."

Isabel again asked Betsy for her purse, but was interrupted by the young woman entreating that she would not leave the money with her. "I am not strong enough to keep it yet," said she, looking round with a suspicious glance at the door. "She would get it all from me; but if your maid would just step in at No. 5, there is a neighbour there who would take the work, and you could settle with her about the payment."

"But you have nothing to eat," said Isabel, "and you must be starving."

"I have no appetite," replied the poor girl; "yet if you would be so good as to leave a shilling with this woman, and ask her to come and make me a cup of tea, it would be the greatest kindness."

Gladly did Isabel comply with this request. Not so her maid; for though Betsy considered her money well lent in the purchase of a handsome dress, she was far from being satisfied with her lady's having undertaken, at her expense, the relief of a case, as disgraceful in Betsy's opinion, as it seemed likely to be interminable in its demands. It was on this occasion, therefore, that, for the first time in her life, she began to evince openly a spirit of discontent towards her mistress, and of opposition to her wishes. A few words of impertinence which

she let fall, at once awakened Isabel's surprise and indignation ; but the sudden recollection that she could not, if she would, dismiss this woman from her service—that she was, in a manner, completely in her power—brought with it a violent revulsion of the proud feeling which had rushed to her heart, and sinking into a chair as soon as she regained her own apartment, she covered her face with both her hands, and gave way to a burst of agony and shame.

How many tears had Isabel lately shed unnoticed by any human being ! How often had her maid—her once kind and attentive maid—passed in and out, and found her weeping, and spoken not one word of soothing ! How often had her husband left her locked in her dressing-room, and gone forth on his own avocations, believing her to be one of the happiest of women ! For Mr. Ainsworth reasoned thus : “ All women wish to be married—consequently all are happy when they are married ; ” and for certain reasons, perhaps, best understood by himself, he thought his wife had a good right to be happier than most. Indeed, Mr. Ainsworth was altogether well satisfied with the matrimonial bargain he had made. His wife had money, she was of respectable parentage, looked well at the head of his table, and moreover was extremely quiet. He never had liked talking women. Women who had opinions, almost always had wishes—and then they got to reasoning about the expediency of laying out money. He eschewed such women ; they were great evils to society, and wasted men's money.

Poor Isabel ! How little did her husband know, while pursuing these reflections on his daily walks to the city, of the hidden fire that burned within the heart he deemed so quiet—so contented with its lot.

Alarmed beyond measure at the first symptoms of rebellion in her maid, though in themselves extremely slight, and not soon repeated, Isabel stooped, as all must stoop who are determined to do wrong, to purchase the compliance she could not otherwise command ; and this she easily accomplished by gifts from her own store of superfluous treasures. Still, however, the impression on her mind was the same — that she had no longer a friend in her maid ; and though appearances on the part of the quondam favourite became more favourable in proportion to the benefits she received, there was something different in her manner—something less respectful and submissive—which induced her mistress to contemplate the expediency of finding a confidant elsewhere. Her choice fell upon the young dressmaker, and for this purpose she ventured out in search of her obscure dwelling, unaccompanied by any witness.

Maria had now recovered her accustomed health. Her apartment, kept in order by her own industrious hand, no longer wore the aspect of wretchedness it had once presented ; and her mother, recently recovered from a long fit of intoxication, was sitting, dejected and feeble, in a low chair beside the fire.

Isabel had no definite reason to allege for making this visit. It was therefore received as one of pure kindness, and the gratitude of the poor girl was proportioned to the rarity with which such visits were made to her.

Isabel was by no means at ease with her own conscience ; she was therefore more susceptible of shame, at having so pure a motive unjustly attributed to her conduct. Under these circumstances, she did what has often been done before, to relieve the mind from similar uneasi-

ness—she suddenly conceived the idea of doing good, and she imagined to herself the pleasure of doing it, to this family on a more extensive scale than mere charity could effect. It is true, she had scarcely ever attempted to do good in her whole life before, because of the trouble required to keep it up; but the recollection of the very little she had done, was connected with a sense of pleasure; and now that pleasure was to her of such rare occurrence, now that so few people loved her—now that life was becoming altogether so dark and desolate—perhaps, if she was to begin to do good, she might feel more comfortable. Besides all this, something whispered in the secret of her heart, that perhaps it might cover a multitude of sins; for, in addition to those of which she knew herself to be guilty at that time, she was seriously contemplating the committal of more. Not that she considered herself much in fault; she rather thought, as many others have done, that her inclinations were on the side of virtue, but that the luckless circumstances in which she was placed, and the influence of those around her, were actually forcing her into a course of conduct which it was impossible to avoid; nor had she yet begun to think so deeply as to understand, that, by allowing this to be the habitual and prevailing feeling of her mind, she was in reality accusing God of injustice, and living in a state of constant blasphemy against the purity and the benevolence of his designs.

A sudden impulse to do good has, however, always something pleasant and cheering in it, and Isabel became more than usually animated as she applied herself to the task of talking with the mother of Maria on the subject of her besetting sin—a task which she undertook with the hope that she might be the means of restoring this lost creature to respectability and comfort.

The poor woman was on this occasion in that low stage of her disease when tears flow abundantly, and often without any definite cause; and Isabel, in her new character of admonitress, was encouraged by these tears to proceed at greater length than she had previously intended. The daughter listened attentively—for the poor and the solitary like to have their sorrows entered into with feeling, and altogether the hour which had passed appeared to have been a very profitable one, when, on Isabel's rising to depart, the poor woman raised her head, and began, in her turn, to speak.

"All that you have said," she observed, "is very well. It is all very true and good, and I could have said as much myself, only in different words; but it is all worth nothing—I tell you, it has no more to do with my case, than tolling the church-bell has to do with the soul that has just gone to judgment. Look here," she continued, beckoning to Isabel to be seated, "you have had your say—it is fit I should have mine now. The case is just this: you talk to me as if I could help it—as if I could stop, and be as I once was again. You can help it, I dare say, and I could help it once; but the time is past, and it would be of no more use for me to make the attempt now, than it would be to try to lift the burdens I carried in my youth. I tell you this plainly, because it is a waste of your fine words, to come here and talk to me." You know nothing about my situation, or what I know, and what I suffer. You have been but a short time married. I was happy for six months; your days of trouble may come, as mine did; and then let us see whether you will deny yourself the wine that warms your heart, and makes you care for nobody. No, no; even now, I dare say, you drink your glass every day—perhaps two—and make

yourself comfortable, though you have a kind husband, and health, and wealth, and I have nothing."

Poor Maria listened to this outbreak of her mother's feeling with a degree of alarm and chagrin, scarcely surpassed by that of the individual to whom this unexpected address had been directed; and following her guest, who prepared to make a speedy exit, to the door, she made the best apology for her mother which the exigency of the moment allowed, by saying that her troubles, and the habits she had given way to, had turned her head.

"Don't mind her, poor thing," she added; "when she talks in this way, she does not mean to be impertinent; and, oh! ma'am, if you could do her any good, what a blessing it would be!"

It was some little consolation to Isabel to find that her endeavours to do good had at least been appreciated in one quarter; but still her disappointment was proportioned to the extraordinary degree of effort she had that morning made, to do evil, as well as good; to serve herself, as well as to serve another. Both these objects had been defeated, and she could only wait for the completion of her own purpose until an opportunity should occur of conversing with the young dressmaker alone.

This opportunity occurred again and again, and still the resolution of Isabel failed her; for there was something in Maria's honest care-worn countenance that seemed to repel every idea of bringing her over to a bad cause. At last, however, she gained courage to make the proposal, that this poor girl should be her secret agent in bringing to the house what she could not openly obtain.

Maria received the proposal in silence; she seemed unable to answer; a deep blush spread all over her face, and then faded away to ashy paleness. She was poor,

and Isabel had ministered to her necessities ; she was unhappy, and her benefactress had shown her more kindness than any other human being since the days of her childhood ; who could she refuse her so small a service in return ? upon what plea could she refuse it, except such as would convey a direct insult ?

All these thoughts and feelings rushed simultaneously through the mind of the poor girl as she stood speechless and trembling, with her eyes fixed on the ground. At last she spoke the simple truth, and her courage seemed to rise with the effort it cost her : “ I dare not, ma’am,” she said ; “ indeed, I dare not ; it was the way we began with my poor mother. Many’s the time I have gone out for her, early and late, into places where it was a shame for a girl like me to be seen ; but I was young then, and little knew the danger of what I did : I know it now, however—nobody knows it better—and the sin would lie at my door, if evil should ever come of it.”

“ Then you compare me to your mother, I suppose,” said Isabel, in no very conciliating tone.

“ Oh ! no, ma’am,” said Maria, “ no, indeed ; far be it from me to compare a lady like you, to my poor mother ; but many great sins come from small beginnings, and, as I said before, it is for those who know what such beginnings are, to keep their hands clean from meddling in them.”

“ Then you may go away,” said Isabel ; “ I have no more occasion for you to-day ; this is the only thing I ever asked of you, and I have no one else to ask now.”

Maria turned away. Tears were streaming from her eyes, but no relenting voice recalled her ; and, with downcast look and heavy heart, she passed along unheeded

through the busy streets which led to her own miserable dwelling. Galled and wounded by this refusal, and the reproach it naturally implied, Isabel was now thrown entirely upon her own resources for the means of obtaining what she had been accustomed to consider as the necessities of life. Like all women whose habits of indulgence resemble her's, she was subject to a variety of nervous affections, as well as to some serious ailments—to hysterical fits, to indigestion, and to occasional faintness; for the prevention or the cure of all which, she was accustomed to make use of strong stimulants, frequently applied.

Symptoms of these disorders had been exhibited soon after her entrance into Mr. Ainsworth's family; but having met with little encouragement, they had been subsequently almost entirely confined to the knowledge of Betsy alone. Now, however, when the circumstances of her case had become more serious, Isabel either was, or believed herself to be, more severely indisposed. Amongst other distressing symptoms, she was seized with violent spasms, and Miss Ainsworth was applied to for brandy, or, indeed, for any kind of spirit; and this prudential person, after expressing her surprise that Mrs. Ainsworth should have recourse to any thing so potent and inflammatory, went so far in compliance with the demand, the third time it was made, as actually to take up stairs with her own hand, a wine-glass full of warm water, slightly discoloured by a few drops of brandy—"It was enough," Betsy said, "to make one ill to look at it."

On Mr. Ainsworth's return from the city, he was, of course, extremely sorry to find his wife so ill; but warm water, he said, was his certain remedy for all disorders of



the stomach, and "Drink plentifully of warm water," was his often-repeated recommendation ; always seconded by his daughter, with this addition, " that the patient should eat nothing for two or three days."

It is needless to say that Betsy and her mistress had different notions about the cure of spasms, upon which they acted in the present instance to the extent of their ability. This ability, however, was daily on the decrease ; for Mrs. Ainsworth's weekly allowance seemed less and less capable of satisfying her wishes ; the sum she owed her maid was beginning to be a very serious one, and that maid was herself less accommodating, less kind, than she had formerly been, and certainly less interested in the happiness of her mistress.

Amongst the many temporary expedients, which under these circumstances presented themselves to the mind of Mrs. Ainsworth, she selected that of requesting either to have possession of the household keys herself, or to have duplicates of them ; and the latter proposal was agreed to, as being a right which the mistress of the house had power to claim.

Had the cellar and the store-room of Mr. Ainsworth been as scantily supplied as his daily board, Isabel might have passed in and out unharmed ; but, unfortunately for her, here were the choice wines, the liqueurs, the cordials, and the good things of every description, upon which her husband prided himself in the entertainment of his guests ; here, in short, was all, and even more than Isabel had been accustomed to enjoy in her mother's house ; and she had free access to it all, and was, in reality, the lawful mistress of it. Here, then, on those rare occasions when the family found time to go from home, she used to come, and examine labels, and taste, and try, and take away

with her what she thought would be most useful in this or that emergency ; until, in time, the vacant places left behind began to look rather wide and numerous ; and still she trusted, that from such plenty, the seeming little she extracted never would be missed.

There is nothing so greedy, nothing so uncalculating, as intemperance. Mrs. Ainsworth knew perfectly well all the time, if she would but have allowed herself to acknowledge it, that her husband was strict in keeping his household accounts, even to the minutest item ; that his daughter followed up the same system ; and that, if even for a while they might both be too much engaged to observe the depredations committed upon their private store, a day of reckoning must come, and come with no pleasant consequences to her ; and still she went on ; for each separate addition made to what she called her necessary comforts, was in itself so small as to excite no immediate alarm ; and as to the day of reckoning, she drove it from her mind, with many other uncomfortable thoughts, by fresh application to those cordial draughts which seemed at once to exhilarate and to soothe.

One cause of uneasiness was, that Betsy became almost necessarily acquainted with all that went on ; she had even been occasionally entrusted with the keys ; and, contrary to the promise made on receiving them, had been permitted, unaccompanied by any witness, to penetrate within those folded doors, which no unsanctioned steps had ever passed before.

Isabel Ainsworth had never, until after her marriage, been guilty of what the world calls intemperance ; surrounded by those whose constant care it was to administer to all her wants, who left no wish ungratified, and never permitted her to feel a moment's pain without some

attempt at alleviation, she had been accustomed merely to lull herself into a kind of waking dream, by a succession of stimulants, chiefly in the form of medicine—under which head were included every variety of tonics, tinctures, and restoratives, with soothing draughts and cordials, sufficient, if one might have believed their printed recommendations, to cure every evil under the sun.

If such be the pampered state of the body, while the mind is at ease, and all goes on prosperously, it is not difficult to imagine to what degree of excess these indulgences must lead when dark days of trouble and anxiety succeed this transient calm—when flattering attentions fall away—when the kind voice of affection is no longer heard—when pleasure wanes, and cheerfulness expires, and the heart begins to ache with its load of daily grief. Add to all this, some gnawing anxiety, some secret torment, and, what was once the mere want of the body, becomes the craving of the mind; what was once a momentary consolation, becomes a poison, greedily devoured; what was once a habit, sanctioned by society, becomes a vice, from which the nearest and the dearest turn away with horror and disgust.

Isabel had passed rapidly on towards this stage of her disease since her marriage; for the general, and, to her, appalling discomfort of her situation, rendered it an object of the first importance to forget herself as much and as often as she could.

This object she had for some time been accomplishing to her heart's content, going just as far as decorum, or rather the fear of detection, would permit, when Mr. Ainsworth, having one evening expressed a wish to speak with her alone, she accompanied him to his own room, not without a sensible, nay, almost an audible palpitation of

the heart ; a disease to which all persons guilty of deception are liable, when summoned to a private audience with those whom they have deceived.

Mr. Ainsworth's look and manner on this occasion were fraught with interest ; his eyes twinkled with intelligence, and his very person appeared magnified by the importance of his object. There was, however, so little of wrath or indignation in his manner of addressing his wife, that she took courage, and seated herself before him with tolerable composure.

There is a class of persons who seem almost better pleased to have discovered an evil than not to have had one committed, even against themselves. Of this class was Mr. Ainsworth ; and sorry as he would otherwise have been to lose even the minutest fraction of his worldly substance, yet the exercise of what he considered his peculiar cleverness in the detection of a thief, went far towards consoling him for the loss he had sustained.

On the present occasion it seemed really to be a gratification to him to state the variety and the amount of articles which had been extracted from his private store, for no other reason than because he believed he had discovered the depredator, and, moreover, had her in his power.

"The questions I particularly wish you to answer me," said he, "are these ; and I wish to have your evidence in your own hand-writing : Have you ever entrusted the keys of my cellar to your woman, Betsy Bower ?"

Amazed and confounded, Isabel answered, "Yes."

"Have you permitted her to enter the cellar and the store-room alone ?"

"Yes."

"Both ?"

“Yes, both.”

“I will not now,” he added, in a tone more severe, “enlarge upon the breach of promise you have committed in so doing, or the danger of allowing to any domestic such a licence. That must be settled hereafter; I have other business in hand now.”

“Have you ever seen empty bottles in the possession of your woman?”

Trembling all over, as well she might, a miserable victim in the grasp of a powerful temptation, Isabel again answered, “Yes.” It was the truth. Oh, despicable violation of the sanctity of truth, when made to answer the vile purpose of a lie!

Isabel had been so entirely taken by surprise on discovering the object upon which her husband’s suspicions had fallen, that she had not at the moment possessed sufficient presence of mind to vindicate her maid. A moment’s reflection, and she might have gathered up her moral power, and done her this act of simple justice. But in that moment, the dread of her own exposure, the shame with which such an exposure must be accompanied, and the unexpected chance of screening herself by another’s condemnation, all presented themselves with such force to her mind, that the temptation was too strong for her integrity, and she suffered her husband to write, nay, even wrote with her own hand, at his request, some of the evidence that was necessary to prove the guilt of her servant. All calculations upon the rashness, the danger of what she had done, upon the probability of her maid recriminating, and indeed upon all probabilities, were reserved for after moments of consideration; and in these moments conscience was again lulled to sleep by the delusive draughts, which afforded only temporary relief to the agony of her soul.

The following day was fixed upon for a public examination of the culprit. Isabel had been charged with the strictest secrecy—and even had no such charge been given, it was not her interest to warn her servant of the storm about to burst upon her head. In the mean time, she knew not how to meet her—what powers of conciliation to put forth—or by what means to win her over to the exercise of such an excess of generosity as would induce her to suffer silently for the sins of her mistress.

How often must the guilty have found that there is no true fellowship in evil! for no sooner do they appeal, for their own preservation, to those principles of generosity and truth by which mankind are bound together, than their whole lives are condemned; and such appeal must necessarily be without effect.

Isabel watched the countenance of her maid; and if she could have consulted with her by looks, instead of words, there were moments when she would have offered her the half of her worldly wealth on condition that she would take upon herself the burden of disgrace, and permit her mistress to escape.

While she anxiously awaited some favourable symptom, the unconscious domestic went about her usual avocations with the same expression of self-preserving care she was accustomed to wear, and which left little to be hoped from her disinterested zeal.

"Betsy," said her mistress, "would it afford you any satisfaction to know that you are remembered in my will?"

"I would rather, if you please," replied the maid, "have the money I have lent you."

"Well, you shall have it very soon; but, in the mean time, I thought you would like to know that your name

is in my will for a legacy of a hundred pounds, to be paid you at my death. Does it give you no pleasure, Betsy?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am, to be sure it does; only I was thinking it might be so long in falling into my hands, as to be of little use when it did come."

"And would you wish me to die, that you might have it sooner, Betsy?"

"Oh, dear! no, ma'am—what a shocking thought! I was only making a few calculations; and as I believe, notwithstanding appearances, that you are some three or four years younger than myself, I was merely supposing that, in the common course of nature, I might be taken first."

"Ah, Betsy, there is little probability of that. I feel that I shall not live long. I shall not be many years a trouble to you, or to any one else."

It seemed that day as if Betsy's heart was steeled against all tender impressions, for neither the promised legacy, nor the subsequent and more affecting allusion to the death of her mistress, produced the slightest change in her countenance or manner; and Isabel was obliged to let all things go on in their own course, and await, with what resolution she could command, the eventful issue.

There was a chance—and on this she built her only hope of security—that the supposed delinquent would not be able to vindicate herself, even by the truth, so as to obtain belief; and that even when she attempted to criminate her mistress, her evidence would be regarded as a base invention, for the concealment of her own guilt.

To such a chance no woman in the possession of her reason would have trusted her good name; but Isabel

was stupified, and lulled into a kind of drowsy calm—her judgment and her powers of calculation so bewildered, that she neither saw distinctly, nor felt the reality of anything past, present, or to come. A slight perception of bare facts, stripped of their relations and contingencies, seemed to be all that was left her; and by the exercise of this faculty, she became aware that the day had arrived on which Mr. Ainsworth intended summoning her servant to an examination before the whole of his family, as well as in the presence of a lawyer, and one or two other gentlemen, who had been invited to dine with him, and whom Mr. Ainsworth considered likely to be edified by the method and tact which he himself intended to exhibit.

The guests accordingly had assembled around the dinner-table; and on the ladies leaving the room, the whole case was laid before them in the most minute and circumstantial manner: Miss Ainsworth, in the mean time, being charged with the duty of calling the family together at a certain hour.

Isabel knew the appointed time, but was too much indisposed to leave her room. She was therefore held excused; the more readily, because of the intimate connexion existing between her and the party implicated, and the painful feelings which an exposure, such as was anticipated, might naturally be supposed to excite in her mind.

At the appointed time, therefore, Miss Ainsworth and her sister entered the dining-room; the bell was then rung for one of the servants, who had been instructed to bring with her the washerwoman, and a boy, who occasionally assisted in the house. Last of all, the luckless Betsy was called in, and requested to sit down amongst



the others. She entered with a look of astonishment, and when she sat down as requested, there played upon her lips a smile of natural curiosity, which induced Mr. Ainsworth to whisper to the lawyer, "See how well she carries it off. But deep as she is, I can fathom her—confident as she feels herself, I have her."

The process of questioning and cross-questioning then commenced; and although the lawyer objected strongly to the presence of the other servants, on the ground of their being probably in league with the delinquent, so sure did Mr. Ainsworth feel of his suspicions having fallen on the guilty object, that he would suffer no interference with his own well-concocted plans.

The smile which had at first played upon Betsy's countenance, and which was, in reality, excited by curiosity to see what all these novel movements would lead to, died away immediately upon the first question being proposed to her. In connexion with this question, an alarming truth had flashed across her mind; and little as she really loved her mistress in comparison with herself, that little was enough to make her tremble for the consequences which might ensue from a disclosure of the facts intrusted to her knowledge. This alteration in the look and manner of the suspected party being observed by Mr. Ainsworth, he turned again to the lawyer, and requested him to take note of this fresh evidence of guilt.

It may easily be understood that Betsy Bower was no very scrupulous moralist. Her idea of the wickedness of a falsehood went no farther than the injury it was calculated to do. A falsehood, which served what she called a good end, was, in her opinion, an act of merit, rather than otherwise, and therefore she felt no hesitation

in flatly denying the several charges brought against her—simply because she knew that her confession of the truth must bring disgrace upon her mistress. Had the idea of being herself the object of suspicion entered her mind, it is more than probable that such a view of the case would have made a material difference in her bias to the side of truth.

In this manner the proceedings went on, much to Mr. Ainsworth's satisfaction; for he was well pleased to have his suspicions of Betsy's character confirmed by her evident tendency to falsehood, as well as dishonesty.

At last, however, the process of examination took such a turn, that Betsy could not but perceive her own real situation; and amazed and indignant at the injurious sentiments entertained against her, she defended herself with energy and warmth. So strong, however, was the evidence against her, that it was difficult to do this without implicating her mistress; yet still she continued firm to her first purpose, plunging deeper and deeper in difficulties, the wider she deviated from the truth.

"And pray may I ask," said she, in the earnestness of her defence, "why you do not allow me to call my witness—why my mistress is not present—that one person, at least, might do me justice. She knows as well as I do that I am innocent."

"Does she so?" said Mr. Ainsworth, with an air of extreme satisfaction; "then I have a curious fact to lay before you—it is upon the testimony of your mistress that you are condemned."

"Indeed," said Betsy, with a smile of incredulity; "I should like to hear what she has to say against me."

"You would like to hear it, would you?" asked Mr. Ainsworth; "then you shall be gratified."

He then opened a paper which he had all the while held in his hand, and read aloud the condemning facts to which he had obtained the testimony of his wife.

Still the woman was undaunted. Her confidence seemed rather to increase than give way; and in this spirit she observed, on the reading of the paper—that seeing was believing, and that unless she saw what had been read in the handwriting of her mistress, she never would be convinced that she had taken any part in it.

“I will indulge you with that pleasure also,” said Mr. Ainsworth; and taking up one of the candles, he walked in a stately and imposing manner across the room, to where Betsy stood.

“Here,” said he, holding out the paper, but not trusting it to her hand, “there, read that.”

Betsy looked long, and examined the writing well. Everybody thought she was either unable to read, or was taking time to invent some new method of defence. Her resolution during that time had been taken; and stepping some paces back, she confronted her master with a look which flashed defiance, and which said more plainly than words—“Now for the truth at last! My mistress and you shall both repent that you have driven me to this; but since you have driven me to it, you shall know all.”

While these proceedings were going on below, Isabel sat alone in her own chamber. She had doubled her usual potion that evening, but without effect. It only seemed to rush to her brain, to make it beat and throb the more, and still she knew what was going on, and heard each sound with a distinctness that jarred upon her nerves. She heard each sound, and therefore knew perfectly well when the servants were all summoned to the dining-room. She heard her own maid called in, and then the door was

closed ; and such a silence reigned throughout the house, that there might have been a meeting of the secret tribunal, about to pronounce its awful and mysterious doom.

Isabel listened, and listened, and still there was no sound. Perhaps at that very moment her faithful servant was bearing injustice, and shame, and injury for her sake. —Perhaps she was disclosing all ! The thought was too horrible. She went to the door, and stood out upon the stairs to listen ; but all was still.

At last, however, there was a general movement, like the breaking-up of some assembly, before any one feels at liberty to speak. It was a strange kind of movement ; for doors were thrown open, and one went this way, and another that, and not a word was spoken. The guests came out, put on their hats, and went away with a short good-night. The two young ladies took up their candles, and walked whispering to bed. The servants betook themselves to their several sleeping-rooms, and none but Betsy and her master seemed to be left behind. It was an inauspicious omen. What could they be consulting about together ? The clock struck ten, and still they neither of them appeared. Before it reached the stroke of eleven, Mr. Ainsworth's step was heard upon the stairs. It was louder than usual, and much more slow.

Mr. Ainsworth was one of those superficially kind and smooth-seeming men, who are in reality the most severe ; and he came up stairs with the full intention of saying every thing to his wife which it was possible to think of, for the purpose of overwhelming her with shame and remorse.

In this object he probably succeeded to his own satisfaction ; for Isabel appeared the following day an humbled and an altered woman. She kept her own room, and saw

nobody but Betsy, who appeared to be busily employed in gathering together all her own things, and packing them as if for a journey. Nor was this business concluded until the close of the day, when she came into the silent apartment of her mistress, and endeavoured, with evident embarrassment, to enter into conversation with her.

This, however, was impossible in Isabel's present state ; and Betsy, pressed by the lateness of the hour, at last told her that she was about to leave her service ; and that it was her master's wish that she should leave that very night. "He has paid me all my money," she added, "and, I must say, has behaved to me more handsomely than some others."

"I hope you will find a better mistress, and be happier than you have been with me," said Isabel, in a tone of voice so low as scarcely to be audible.

The woman seemed a little moved, at least she wiped her eyes ; and, wishing her mistress every blessing, turned away.

"Betsy," said her mistress, calling her back, "I think you loved and respected my mother."

"Oh ! yes, indeed I did, above everybody."

"Then, perhaps, for her sake, you will take a little care not to blaze about what has lately passed in the house."

"You may depend upon me," said Betsy, "to my dying day ;" and again wishing her mistress that happiness which she did not appear very likely to enjoy, she turned away, and left her, without a feeling of regret.

And Isabel was left by every one ; at least, so far as relates to all affectionate attentions. It is true, she deserved her fate. She knew that she deserved it ; but that conviction did not render it the more easy to endure.

Mr. Ainsworth was one of those disciplinarians whose ideas of punishment have reference to the past, rather

than the future. Had he been a man having authority, he would have imposed upon all offenders such penalties as he thought their sins deserved, instead of subjecting them to such treatment as would have been likely to do them good. It never entered into his mind to imagine that his wife ought to have been treated with tenderness, as a weak and erring woman ; and at the same time with discretion, as a moral agent. Instead of this, he set before her in the most repulsive form, the consequence of such habits as she had been indulging ; but, above all, he dwelt upon the waste—" the shameful waste " she had committed.

How little regard is sometimes paid by those who would correct our faults, to the motives they propose to us for their correction. When a rich man who hoards his money, instead of devoting it to benevolent purposes, talks about the shameful waste of eating or drinking more than enough, his arguments are altogether unintelligible to those whose greediness is for good things, rather than for gold. He is, in fact, endeavouring to uproot one evil by the force of another—to substitute avarice for intemperance. And no wonder that his efforts should fail ; for seldom do we find that any wrong propensity can be eradicated by wrong means.

Isabel, fallen, degraded as she was, still retained the capability of being influenced by any powerful moral feeling, could such have been awakened in her soul. It was impossible for her husband to produce any lasting change in her habits, by holding out the hope of adding to his wealth, or the fear of diminishing it ; but had he treated her as labouring under a pitiable malady, rather than as guilty of disgusting and degrading crimes ; and had he proposed to her to devote the money she had been

accustomed to spend in superfluities, to some noble and benevolent purpose ; instead of diminishing her pecuniary allowance, and subjecting her to the most severe and humiliating deprivation of all free-agency in her domestic department, he might, in all probability, have won her over to a higher sense of duty, and made her wiser and better for the rest of her life.

This, however, was a mode of treatment for which he possessed neither inclination nor skill ; and therefore he went on in his own short-sighted way, believing his wife was perfectly safe, because she had no longer the power to do wrong.

And so far as related to any immediate indulgence of the habits to which she had been rapidly falling a victim, Isabel certainly was safe for a while—safe, so far as she was penniless, and without a friend ; and in this apparent security she remained for some time, subject to that deep and almost intolerable depression, which is the natural consequence of any sudden suspension of excessive stimulus.

We have said that Mr. Ainsworth had a third daughter, a neglected child, who from incurable lameness, and a complication of constitutional maladies, was always confined to her own chamber, and left almost entirely to the care of servants, who attended to her wants, as her sisters did also, when they had nothing else to do.

This afflicted girl had been as much spoiled by neglect, as Isabel had been by indulgence. Not that any one was intentionally unkind to her ; but in losing her mother, she had lost the only friend whose patient love could have borne cheerfully with her ceaseless complaints, and with that fretfulness of temperament which had probably been occasioned by early suffering, and by mismanagement of

almost every kind. Her temper, she was often told, drove everybody away from her; and according to Mr. Ainsworth's general system of discipline, she was made to feel the consequences, without any other attempt to remedy the evil.

Isabel had settled it in her own mind, that this child had not a common share of understanding; partly from her extreme ignorance, and partly from the reluctance she evinced to cultivate any kind of intimacy with her stepmother. There was something, however, in her finely formed countenance, which seemed to counteract this impression, and the expression of her face, when she was not suffering either from pain or ill-humour, had something in it more interesting and intelligent than seemed ever justified by her habits or conversation.

Isabel was so little accustomed to pursue any object which gave her trouble, that she had entirely ceased from all endeavours to gain the affection or the confidence of this singular and solitary being; believing, what was not, perhaps far from the truth, that all such endeavours on her part excited prejudice, more than they gained esteem. Yet in her present state of forlornness, and destitution of every comfort, she had learned to seek the chamber of this suffering child, particularly after she had been lulled to sleep by her accustomed opiate, simply because she could sit there more secure from all chance of interruption than in any other room of the house. Under the influence of these opiates, Matilda, for that was the name of the lame girl, slept so soundly, that there was no need for any one to spend the night beside her; and here, then, Isabel used to sit often until long after midnight, her feet resting on the fender, and her eyes riveted on the dying embers of the expiring fire.



Those who would describe the extreme of human misery, are, perhaps, too apt to dwell upon the striking and eventful calamities which mark the different eras of human life. Any sudden reverse of fortune, or awful death, or overwhelming shock, from whatever cause it may arise, is described as the test by which fortitude and faith are most severely tried. There are others, however, whose experience and observation would rather lead them to point out, as scenes of the deepest suffering, those solitary moments which memory may possibly record in the experience of all, when the tears of the mourner fall unseen; when their cause, both in its nature, and its degree of poignancy, is unknown; and when, so far from claiming kindness, or sympathy, or fellow-feeling, from any of the human family, the solitary sufferer is shunned by all as an object of contempt or abhorrence.

It is when man has forsaken us, and we feel we have deserved that God should do the same, when a sense of guilt is mingled with our grief, without that penitence which would seek for pardon—it is then that true despair becomes our portion—it is then that mere human fortitude becomes unequal to our aid—it is then that desperation seizes on the unsupported soul, and, with a frenzied and unnatural strength, strange deeds are done, to account for which mankind are subsequently busy in assigning causes, sometimes the most remote from reason and from truth.

Perhaps there is nothing which more effectually accelerates the progress towards this state, than to be entangled in the meshes of our own deception, foiled in our endeavours to do wrong, and thrown back upon the silent and solitary cogitations of a heart that would have been more sinful if it could. And if, under such circumstances,

there should be the additional depression arising from a sudden suspension of accustomed stimulus, we may hold ourselves prepared for any calamitous, or even fatal issue.

It is true, that the victim of excess, under these circumstances, most frequently devises new and more effectual plans for self-indulgence; but, where these are effectually and forcibly defeated, how tender ought to be the treatment, how constant the care, how unobtrusive the watchfulness, how delicate and kind the soothing, that would win back the wanderer to the ways of peace!

The luckless being we have been describing, knew nothing of this treatment. Soothing and tenderness were the last medicines that would have been thought of for her case; and, consequently, she sat alone, day after day, feeling that she was an object of loathing and contempt; and wishing in vain that the grave would hide her from the sight of those who were weary of her life.

It was on one of those miserable nights we have described, when the family had all retired to rest, that she sat, as usual, in the silent chamber of the sick child, whose sleep, for the early part of the night, was generally so heavy as almost to resemble death. And is there not something in the speechless presence of one who is locked in deep sleep, more awful and more impressive than absolute solitude?

Isabel felt this, and, if she moved, it was in that quiet and stealthy step with which people glide around the couch of death; while her eyes were often turned to the bed of the sleeping child, as we turn to the dead with a sort of instinctive notion that the shroud has stirred, or that the feet are trembling underneath. The clock had struck the hour of twelve. It was long after all the

members of the household had retired to their different apartments, and not a sound was to be heard, above, below, or around.

Isabel sat for a full half-hour with her eyes fixed upon the mantel-piece, and her whole frame as motionless as the marble on which she gazed. At last, a strange wild thought flashed burning across her soul. It was but for a moment, yet it left its traces there, like what the lightning leaves on the visible and material world. It was but for a moment, yet how changed was even her outward aspect! A wild convulsive movement now distorted every feature, and her eyes seemed starting from their sockets, as she looked again at a small phial which stood upon the marble, and on which, in large letters, was written the word LAUDANUM.

Isabel rose from her seat. She caught a sight of her own countenance in the mirror. It looked strange even to her, for it was ghastly as death, and her lips white as ashes. Her limbs, which at first had trembled, now absolutely quivered. She could not hold that small phial in her hand. A sudden weakness came over her, nature recoiled, she fell back in her chair, and, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, she looked up to that heaven from which she felt as if shut out for ever. Memory—the memory of natural and familiar things, as if then stirred for the last time, brought up from its depths such long-forgotten treasures—such sweet and pleasant pictures of love and joy, of youth and childhood, that from the brink of the dark gulf into which she was about to plunge, she was transported back to those days of comparative innocence, when she used to read the Bible on her mother's knee. It was too much; she sunk on the ground in the attitude of supplication; but she could not

pray. How would it have been possible to pray, with such a purpose at her heart?

When she rose again, a calmer and more deathly aspect was on her features. Her teeth were clenched, her lips parted, and drops of cold perspiration stood upon her brow. Her strength returned with more than natural force. She could have wielded a weapon, had such been necessary for her purpose. In one hand she held a cup, with the other she poured out the fatal draught. She raised it to her lips, and all the visible world was reeling from her sight, when a faint voice uttered the word "Mother!"

"Mother!" said the child, awakening, and stretching out her arms.

"Mother!"—it went to the soul of that guilty woman, for it was the first time that holy word had ever been addressed to her, and it came at that dreadful moment with all its responsibilities, its sweet requirements, and its sacred trust, like balm to the burning bosom it was sent sent to calm.

"Mother!" said the child again, but now she looked distressed and disappointed. "Oh! I was dreaming of my own dear mother; she used to kneel beside that chair, when she said her prayers at night, and I thought I saw her there again. But, oh! she was not like you." And she turned away her face, to hide it in the pillow, with an expression of dislike, more evident than she had ever betrayed before.

Isabel understood, and felt it all; yet something attracted her to the side of the bed where the suffering girl was laid, and she stood there as meekly as if she had been a criminal at the bar of justice.

"Poor child!" she said at last, "I fear I have dis-

turbed you; but I am in great trouble, and have nowhere else to weep."

Matilda turned her head, and looked earnestly in her face, but did not speak.

"Can you forgive me?" said Isabel, "if I promise never to disturb you again?"

"Then where will you go?"

"Oh! no matter. I only wish I might go into my grave."

"You frighten me," said the child; and she began to cry.

"No wonder;" said Isabel to herself—"no wonder I am an object of terror, as well as of disgust." And then, turning again to the child, she asked if there was any one she would like to have sent to her,

"No," said Matilda, "they would only scold me for disturbing them."

"Then why do you not scold me?" said Isabel.

"Perhaps I should scold you, if I dared, and if you did not look so wretched. And yet, I don't think it was you either, that disturbed me; but one of those dreams I often have about my mother, when I see, and hear her, as distinctly as if she was alive; and then I start, and wake, and find that she is dead, and I am all so lonely!"

"Was your mother very kind to you?" asked Isabel.

"She was, indeed," said the child; "kind and good as an angel; and she loved me, lame, and ill-tempered, and disagreeable as I am, better than all her other children. And she used to touch me with such a soft and gentle hand, it never hurt at all. But now, I dread the servants moving me, and my sisters are not much better; and when I cry out, and tell them how rough they are,

they say it is my own bad temper. Have you a kind mother?"

"I had a mother as kind as yours."

"And is she dead?"

"She is dead too."

"But you are not lame, and therefore you cannot want her back again so much as I do mine."

"You are right; and yet I do want her sometimes."

"Why do you want her?"

"To be kind to me."

"Is nobody kind to you?"

"Not very."

Matilda began to look interested, for there is something in the voice of real grief which art cannot counterfeit, and nature cannot resist.

"Was your mother happy?" asked Isabel.

"I suppose she was," replied the child, "because she was good. But no one knew whether she was happy or not, for she never spoke of herself. She was always thinking of others—always doing good to somebody. And then, so self-denying; she would eat the plainest food, and she drank no wine, so that she never looked flushed, and heated, as some people do; but pale, and pure, and gentle. I am afraid you are sometimes angry with me because I cannot call you mother; yet if you knew the difference, you would not wonder."

"I can easily understand the difference," said Isabel; yet, if I should try to be very kind to you, do you think you could ever overcome your dislike?"

"I would do my best; but you know there must be something more than kindness to make us love any one—and there is one thing I never could get over."

"What is that?"

"Do you really wish me to tell you?"

"Yes."

"Then come near to me, and let me whisper; for it is not fit to be spoken aloud."

Isabel bent down her head, and the child did whisper something that brought the deepest crimson to her face, which before had been so pale. Yet a sort of strange fascination kept her there, and she asked again, whether if this objection was removed, the child could then love her.

"I think I could," she replied, "at least after a long, long while. There is a good deal in having no one else to love. Perhaps there is more still in thinking you are miserable, and lonely, like myself."

"Then will you let me come and help to dress you in the morning?"

"Matilda looked up astonished, and exclaimed, "You do not mean what you say. Will I let you! Why, one would think it was a favour."

"I shall think it one."

"What can you mean? Nobody ever thought it a favour before. I cannot understand you."

"Try me, then; and promise me that I may come to you to-morrow morning, and perhaps you will learn to understand me better."

Isabel scarcely knew what she said, or what she felt; a strange and new sensation seemed to take possession of her soul. On the brink of that dark gulf from which she had been rescued, light dawned upon her; and, for the first time in her life, she resolved to live for others, rather than for herself.

The morning found her true to her engagement; and

if gentleness had been all the poor child required, she could not well have had a softer hand than Isabel's, or an attendant more meek, and patient, and willing to oblige.

There is, in fact, a strange—a most affecting state of humiliation produced by the last stage of despair. While a glimmering of hope remains, while a single comfort is left to cling to, the human mind is capable of effort, and will employ such effort to maintain its rights; but when all is gone—the last spark extinguished—the last tie broken—the consequences become like those of solitary and speechless confinement, which human nature has never yet been found strong enough to endure.

An effect, as cheering as it was unlooked for by Isabel, seemed to be produced upon the feelings of the child, by her own gentle manners, and her evident distress, or rather, despondency of mind.

“There,” said Matilda, when the task of dressing was accomplished, “if you would only teach the servants to touch me as you have done, it would spare me so much pain! I believe I should be better tempered too, and that would be a great point gained. Will you try to teach them?”

“Willingly. But I would rather do the same service for you every morning myself, if you will allow me.”

“If I will allow you! I cannot understand your meaning. You must be making game of me.”

“Do I look like making game?”

“Oh, no! you look too sad for that. Yet no one ever thought it pleasant to do anything for me since my mother died, and it seems impossible that you should.”

“You must try me.”

“I should like to understand you first.”



“It is impossible you should do that. You must try me first.”

“But then, if I should begin to love you, and should find out it was all true that people say of you.”

“It is all true, I dare say, and that is the very reason why I ask you, as a favour, to let me wait upon you ; because, I feel that I am not worthy, even to be your servant.”

“Ah ! now I see you are making game of me, for you know I am a very, very wicked child, sinning with my temper many times every day ; so that no one likes to come near me. But a bright thought has just struck me—suppose you and I were to try to make each other better. I will confess to you, and you shall confess to me ; and no other living creature shall know anything about it.”

“I would willingly accept your proposal, if I thought I could be of any service to you.”

“And would you not do the same for your own sake ?”

“You are still young. Your habits are not established. The world is all before you, and you can yet make friends.”

“And you ?”

“My case is hopeless. I have outlived all who ever really loved me.”

“And for that reason will you give up everything ? Oh ! do not let the horrid things they say of you be true. Do not suffer yourself to go down lower, and lower, until no one can help you.”

“No one has ever tried to help me, but you.”

“And I never tried to help any one before. Do not then disappoint me in my first good effort. I am a weak

and foolish child, a trouble to all who are connected with me. Oh, if I could do some good !”

And the poor invalid actually started from her couch, and, with her hands clasped together, lifted up her fine deep expressive eyes, which looked as if her soul was at that moment raised to a higher sphere of thought and feeling, than it had ever occupied before. And so, in fact, it was ; for who can resolve to do their utmost to save another from destruction, even though their power should be ever so limited, without being sensible at the same time of a degree of moral elevation, compared with which, how worthless, and how mean, are all the tributes of applause the world can render, and all the honours it can bestow !

It was a strange and new sensation to Isabel, to feel that any one was really interested in her good. It seemed to lift her out of the gulf of despair, into which she was falling. It is true, the only being who evinced this solicitude was a mere child, and one whose character had hitherto been hidden from her knowledge ; but the path of life can never be entirely desolate, so long as there is one being left to think, and feel, and pray for us. It was strange, too, that a child who was considered so untractable, and perverse, should evince so amiable a tenderness for one who had fallen below the consideration of all others ; but there are warm hearts, whose instinctive yearnings no harshness can subdue ; and in her lonely and isolated condition, the humble tones of utter wretchedness, even from an unloved voice, had reached the secret soul of the neglected sufferer, and awakened feelings there as powerful as they were unlooked for from her.

An agreement was now entered into between the

mother and the daughter, that they should confess to each other whenever they gave way to what might justly be considered as the one paramount temptation with each: nor was this the only bond of intercourse and strengthening intimacy between them. All that was kind, all that was affectionate, in the character of Isabel Ainsworth, was now called into exercise, and rewarded by the gratitude of one, who felt it the more deeply, from the rarity with which such blessings had ever been bestowed on her.

Matilda was the first to confess having yielded to her besetting sin, and she did this with some degree of petulance; for the warmth of her temper had scarcely subsided, before the love of truth had prompted the confession.

Degraded as Mrs. Ainsworth was in the eyes of her own family, and humble as was the place she held in their esteem, it formed no part of the discipline of her husband to humble her before the rest of the world. She was therefore still treated, in the presence of his friends, in all respects as the mistress of the house; and, when company had to be entertained, she was dressed with as much elegance, and stationed at the head of the table with as much ceremony, as if still an honoured wife and mother.

Isabel felt this mockery; yet she knew it was due to her husband's respectability that it should be so; and she was herself so humbled, and so broken in spirit, as to yield a passive assent to all his wishes. Perhaps we should scarcely say to *all*, for there was one wish, more imperatively enforced than all others, which she would not, or could not, yield to, on the only occasions when any possibility of deviating from it occurred.

It was on one of these occasions, when great prepara-

tions had been made for a dinner-party, that she first gave way to that reckless feeling of despair, which led her to look defiance at her husband, as he sat, knitting his brows, at the opposite end of the table, and threatening, as far as a man of bland and polite manners could threaten, by look, and sign, and gesture, that she should be made to pay dearly for her present imprudence.

Alas, for poor Isabel! All the guests that were eating and drinking to their hearts' content; wine was pressed upon every one but her, by the master of the house. Delicate and exemplary ladies partook of it, and each one seemed to consider it as the wholesome, rational, and even necessary accompaniment, of hours of social enjoyment. How could it be, that she, the mistress of the table, was shut out from an indulgence so common to all—an indulgence so lawful, and so universally approved!

Her own will had not been consulted, her own consent had not gone along with her recent abstinence, and therefore it was not likely she should voluntarily make herself an exception to the general rule, when individuals so highly esteemed in society as those around her, and ladies of such unblemished character, were making themselves, what she and her maid had been accustomed to call, "comfortable." Yes, and too well did she remember the cheerful animation, the glow, the stimulus which these familiar means had been wont to diffuse throughout her frame, the careless independence of circumstances, the energy to look danger in the face, and the warmth of cordial feeling with which indifferent persons could then be met. Too well did she remember all this; and never did she seem to need it more than now. She had no intention of going farther—nay, not even so far, as some of the good ladies at the table; and while the conven-

tional rules of society required them so often to refill their glasses, while they were pressed to do so even by the master of the house, how was it probable that his stern looks directed to herself, should produce the desired effect, especially when they were so bland and sweet the moment he addressed himself to others, who were doing the very same thing, from which, with all the power of his lordly authority, he had so imperatively warned her to abstain? No, no, there must be consistency in all systems of moral government; and the restrictions we would enforce for the benefit of those who need them, must also be the rule of our own actions—just as the code of laws by which the ignorant or rebellious part of the community are restrained, must be as binding on the judge who pronounces sentence of punishment upon the criminal, as they are upon the meanest subject of the realm.

The company who met at Mr. Ainsworth's on the day alluded to, thought they had never seen the lady of the house more pleasant. At first they thought she was either ill, or out of spirits; but as the evening advanced, she became lively and animated, and finally parted from her guests with a cordiality of manner which made her, in their opinion, one of the most delightful of women.

They were none of them made acquainted with the hours which succeeded to the breaking-up of that cheerful party—they none of them beheld her on the following morning, when she shrunk from appearing before the suffering child, whose nurse, whose counsellor, whose mother, she had promised to be.

The fact was, while Mrs. Ainsworth sat amongst her guests, surrounded by the ceremonials of polished society, encouraged by the example of others of her sex, and protected from any open display of her husband's dis-

pleasure, her conscience was lulled to repose by that half excitement, which, while it gently stimulates the body, diffuses a dreamy vagueness over all the moral perceptions of the soul. It was for the conviction of after-hours to impress upon her mind, that what was by others indulged in as the innocent enjoyment of social hours, was destruction to her peace—what was generally believed to be wholesome aliment to them, was nothing less than poison to her. It was destruction to her peace, for all her habitual, but then half-subdued cravings for false stimulus, came back with redoubled force; and it was poison, because it made her feel again in a state, to purchase, at any price, the once familiar means of transient forgetfulness and repose.

Isabel Ainsworth was seated the following morning alone in her dressing-room, her aching temples resting on her hands, and her whole being lost in one vague feeling of despondency, when a gentle step was heard along the passage leading to her door, and an humble inquiry from a stranger's voice whether the visitor might come in.

It was Maria, the poor dressmaker; and finding the lady, as she had hoped to find her, alone and disengaged, she ventured to ask, in a modest and unobtrusive manner, if Mrs. Ainsworth was in want of any one as her own private maid.

"You have probably heard that Betsy has left me," said the lady.

"I have," replied Maria.

"It is not intended"—she continued, but suddenly corrected herself, and added—"I have no intention of keeping a maid now."

"And you have no want of any one in the house to do your plain work, or your dressmaking?"

“ Oh, no ! I want nothing. I do not wish to attach myself to any one, and no one wishes to do anything for me.”

Maria looked earnestly in the lady's face, with an expression, in her own, of wonder, and deep interest. The words she heard were a perfect mystery, but the tone of voice in which they were uttered needed no explanation ; and yielding to a natural impulse of compassion and sympathy, she spoke more freely than her wonted modesty would otherwise have allowed.

“ Oh ! yes, ma'am,” she said, “ I am sure you want somebody to wait upon you, to serve you, to be faithful and kind to you ; for you know all want kindness, however rich and exalted they may be.”

“ Yes, Maria, you are right ; and no one wants it more than I do. But if I am rich, I am not exalted ; and it is possible to fall so low, as to be thought unworthy of any kindness.”

Maria was again at a loss what to think of the actual situation of a lady whom the world considered so enviable, and so happy. She, like others, had heard whisperings that all was not so pleasant in Mr. Ainsworth's establishment as it looked on the surface ; she, like others, had heard that the lady was not exactly what had been expected of her, in her private habits ; but these reports had not lessened the gratitude of the poor dressmaker, for the kindness received at her hands ; and her own circumstances requiring that she should make some change in her mode of living, she had chosen to offer her services to Mrs. Ainsworth in preference to any other person.

“ My poor mother,” said she, after entering upon her own story, “ is, I fear, beyond all hope. I have tried my utmost to maintain her by my work, but her habits have driven away all my best friends. I am now determined

to adopt a different plan—to leave her to herself. It seems a hard thing for a child to do, yet I am supported by the advice of an excellent gentleman who has taken great pains in that part of the town where we live, and been the means, under Providence, of saving many a poor family from ruin. The person my mother married for her second husband, I have already said, is a hard man; but I must do him the justice to add, that he has come forward on this occasion, and agreed to join with me in her support, each of us supplying a weekly sum out of our earnings, so that she will have no need to suffer, unless she brings distress upon herself. And now, ma'am, if you should want a person in the capacity I have mentioned, you will find no one more anxious to serve you faithfully than myself."

The offer was a tempting one to Isabel, for she had keenly felt the privation of having no longer an attendant upon her person, no one whose undivided attentions she could command as a right. Her authority, as the mistress of the house, was, however, so entirely nominal, that she could only refer Maria to Mr. Ainsworth, and she did this without the slightest hope that her wishes would be complied with.

Merely considered as her wishes, it is more than probable they would not; but it so happened that he had already been looking out for a trustworthy and economical person, to fill the station for which Maria had offered herself. Arrangements were therefore soon entered into, by which the poor dressmaker became a member of Mr. Ainsworth's family, and her mistress had then the advantage of proving, how superior is a faithful, to a flattering servant. Dutiful, and devoted, as Maria was, to the interest of her mistress, in one point she proved unflinch-



ing ; and it is probable that the unassailable integrity of this simple girl, had more effect upon the infatuated being over whom she watched, than all the reproaches and severity of her equals in rank and station.

It was, however, not the resolution of a moment with Isabel, which saved her from ruin. It was the yearning of a wounded spirit after better things, which often proved too weak for the conflict of the day. It was a recurrence again and again to those aspirations of the soul, which all, except the utterly depraved, at times experience. It was a determination so often violated, so often shaken, that no forbearance, but that of the Giver of all holy desires, could have received again to the bosom of mercy, the weak and erring wanderer who strayed so perversely from the path of peace.

In addition to the watchful eye of her faithful attendant, Isabel had the reproachful looks of her adopted child to meet, whenever she transgressed the rule this child had laid down for her ; and fertile as Matilda was in finding excuses for herself, she found none for deviations which to her appeared as gross, as they were wholly unaccountable. Thus the force and simplicity of her expressions, whenever she spoke the language of condemnation on this subject, were such as to make her mother shrink before her ; while her best, and strongest resolutions were often formed by the bedside of the suffering child.

Sad would it be, however, and fatal to our best interests, if our good resolutions were left entirely to our own strength. There is a mighty power which may often be seen at work around us, removing obstacles, making duties easier, and raising up barriers to protect us from temptation and danger.

Isabel discovered, in her growing intimacy with the neglected being, whose situation claimed her utmost tenderness, that she had to do with a more than ordinarily gifted mind, whose latent powers, existing without the means of exercise, afforded a sufficient cause for much of that irritability and discontent for which Matilda had hitherto been more blamed than pitied. One talent, which she possessed in a more than common degree, was a genius for music. It not only soothed her ruffled temper, but exercised so great a power over her whole frame, that the violence of her bodily sufferings became subdued under its influence, while her whole being was so changed, that a new existence seemed to dawn upon her.

Isabel had never regretted, so much as on making this discovery, that indolence had prevented her cultivating to a greater extent her own taste for music. Still she knew enough to please Matilda; and when she first conceived the idea, and proposed to the listless and unoccupied girl to become her teacher on the piano, it would have been difficult to say which of the two, the mother or the daughter, was the most happy. It seemed as if, to the poor child, there was an actual expansion of being in the mere thought—so vacant had been the long hours of her lonely life, so destitute of melody the chamber in which her young spirit had pined and fretted like a captive bird. The dry routine of learning, in its least attractive form, had been sometimes tried upon Matilda by her sisters, and on every occasion had been pronounced, entirely through her own perverseness, to be a total failure. She was, in fact, considered as incompetent, though her countenance, and her occasional remarks, were strongly contradictory of this assertion. She now

began to show, however, of how much her character was capable, how trifling was her estimate of difficulties when a sufficient end was to be attained, and how much her spirit could rise above the sufferings under which it had been accustomed to sink, when occupation was afforded to the faculties of her mind.

In the anticipated pleasure of teaching the impatient child the only thing she had yet evinced an inclination to learn, Mrs. Ainsworth was, however, disappointed; for how to teach music without an instrument, and how to procure one, were questions of paramount difficulty to solve; nor was it until repeated applications for the necessary sum had been denied, that she clearly saw, and bitterly regretted, the folly of having spent her own money as she had done—in personal—nay, worse—in bodily gratification. A little less of this indulgence, for the last few years of her life, would now have enabled her to rouse into cheerful and healthy exercise, the powers of a mind, which nothing but adverse circumstances could have depressed; and yet, in consequence of her lavish and fruitless expenditure upon the body, she must see this young mind cast down, repining, hopeless, and unoccupied.

Isabel felt daily more and more the distress in which her long established habits of selfish indulgence had involved her; but she felt at the same time, what was in some measure a new sensation with her, that her present object was a good one; and she determined, if it were possible, to overcome every obstacle which stood in the way of its accomplishment, and for this purpose she ventured to renew her application to her husband.

Mr. Ainsworth could understand the difference between vice and virtue, so far as vice was allowed to be wasteful

and extravagant, virtue decent and saving; but how to understand the claims of his wife when she had no object in view beyond that of imparting happiness to an obscure and profitless individual, or of elevating an humble fellow-being in the scale of moral agency, was more than could be expected of a man like him; and the refusal he so often repeated, was prompted more by a conviction of the extreme unreasonableness of the demand, than by any decided feeling of unkindness.

What then was left for Isabel to do? She applied to Miss Ainsworth. She even condescended to bargain with her for the price of many household luxuries, which she proposed for the future to deny herself. Miss Ainsworth, however, had as little understanding of the case as her father, and she replied with blank astonishment—"If you have no need for these things, and don't intend to take them, why should I pay you for them? It is a principle with us never to take what is unnecessary."

Poor Isabel! she was on the point of yielding to her natural feelings of despondency, when suddenly recollecting her jewels, she exclaimed—"Never more shall this person, so unattractive, so degraded, be decked with costly ornaments as it has been. It is for me to shrink from observation, not to court the gaze of others."

The alternative which thus presented itself was soon acted upon. In the absence of Mr. Ainsworth, a piano was purchased, and placed in Matilda's room; and though the disapprobation with which this daring act of extravagance was regarded by the master of the house, was by no means trifling, Isabel was more than rewarded for the reproaches she had to endure, by the uncontrollable joy of the delighted girl.

Lessons on the piano were now regularly commenced,

and though the process of learning music is a very different one from that of practising it when learned, it afforded to the mother and the daughter a constant occupation, highly beneficial in its influence upon both.

In the mean time, Maria, Mrs. Ainsworth's faithful attendant, did not lose sight of her infatuated mother. A small, but comfortable apartment, had been procured for this miserable woman, and the means of subsistence were regularly transmitted to her hand, yet such was her chagrin on finding herself thus deserted, that, instead of her punishment working out her cure, she seemed only to give herself up to more unlimited excess. It was on one of those occasions, when all her means of indulgence were exhausted, and when her spirits had sunk to the lowest depth of despair, that her husband having visited her obscure and humble dwelling, had used words of reproach and insult, which even her broken spirit had not been able to endure. Like too many others in his situation, he had treated her case as one of disgusting enormity, and, instead of pointing out the ray of hope which still remained, he had harrowed up her soul by those personal allusions, which she was not yet sufficiently degraded to bear with patience or equanimity of mind.

In this state he had left her, when, rising from her lowly seat, she looked round her small apartment with a wild and hurried glance. She then took up the remnant of a tattered cloak, and, wrapping it closely round her, walked out into the street, where the gusty wind of an October afternoon was rolling the dust in thick clouds before her. Had the air of the city been less dense, it is probable it would have made little difference in her perceptions, for she walked straight onward for the space of half an hour,

until her eye caught a glimpse of the cold waters of the Thames. The sight made her shudder, and she grasped her cloak still closer on her breast, and still she walked on.

At last her progress was arrested by a crowd of persons with whom she came in contact unawares. They were assembled round a speaker, whose dress and language were not those of a minister of religion, and yet he appeared to be as much in earnest, as deeply absorbed in the importance of the cause he was advocating, as if he had both the temporal and eternal interests of his auditors at heart. That he had many and bitter opponents was evident, from the rude vociferation of some of the lowest and meanest of the crowd ; but that he was a dauntless and lion-hearted man, was equally evident from the cool and cheerful manner in which he repelled every attempt to put him down.

Gilbert Gray was nothing better than a tradesman, and that by no means of the highest order. His appearance, under ordinary circumstances, was that of a common man. He had neither the wildness of an enthusiast, nor the aristocratic bearing of a hero in disguise. He was no sectarian, nor did he take part in any of the disputes by which the religious world is so lamentably divided. He was no politician either, at least he interfered not with questions of public interest, farther than he had ability to understand, or power to influence them.

There was one question, however, of incalculable importance to the well-being of society, which he did clearly understand, and in which he felt himself imperatively called to act ; because he believed it to be a righteous cause ; and thus he went forth, in defiance of powerful opposition, of still more powerful ridicule and contempt,

satisfied to be in his own individual person despised, contemned, and at times apparently borne down, because he knew that the glorious cause was progressing, that the mists of gross ignorance were passing away from the eyes of the multitude, that conviction was taking root in the high places of the earth, that the song of gratitude and joy was beginning to ascend from unsullied lips in some of the lowest paths of human life, and that even the enlightened and the good were feeling that one effort more, one additional sacrifice, was richly worth their making, for the sake of the weak brothers, and the erring sisters, whom their example might thus be the means of saving,

And was not this true heroism? To stand forth before the eyes of men a mere commoner, unsupported by rank, or wealth, or influence—to stand forth in opposition to one of the most cherished, the most popular, and widely spread evils that ever infected with its deadly poison the understandings and the lives of men. Was not this true heroism, to dare to be accounted, not a violator of his country's laws, for such men are sometimes honoured—but a busybody, a meddler, a fool, scarce worthy of the name of man? Yet, there, beneath the calm clear light of an autumnal sky, when even the smoke of the great human hive was not able to obscure the golden glory of the setting sun—there, by the side of the broad river, whose banks were crowded with busy multitudes, and whose sleeping waters reflected the tall masts of the dark vessels, which lay along its sides—there, stood this fearless man, his head uncovered, his forehead bold and clear, his look a blaze of energy, his air, his gestures instinct with feeling, his voice the untaught music of a lofty mind, his language the eloquence of that genuine, living, deep

conviction, which the wisdom of the world is powerless to overthrow.

It was a motley crowd who formed the audience, in the centre of which this undaunted speaker stood. Some who composed it were labourers returning from their work, mechanics with their aprons folded round them, female servants stealing a few moments from a hasty errand, mendicants who had been out all day, and, worse than these, the lowest grade of human beings—men and women to whom no reputable abode was ever open. Amongst these, some laughed, some shouted, some threw stones; but there were some who listened with such intense and growing interest, that their strongly marked, and sometimes ghastly faces were stretched forward, while, by the expression of their wild and sunken eyes, they seemed to be inquiring—“are these things so?”

Amongst these was a woman of most appalling and repulsive aspect, who had already attracted the attention of the speaker; yet so entirely was her own mind absorbed with the momentous subject, that she knew not when her cloak fell back, leaving nothing but her grey hair, in loose elf-locks, to shade her haggard brow and cheek, where the track of burning tears was already beginning to be seen.

And was it not worth bearing all which that noble-hearted man had borne, to see the wretched being who now stood before him, thus softened; to know that her guilty and degraded soul was touched; and to be able to pour into the wound the oil of consolation, by teaching her that even for her there was hope?

The speaker ceased at last, as the shadows of evening came on, and the crowd dispersed; but not before they had become generally more attentive and respectful.



That ghastly woman too, drew up her cloak, and retired to some little distance, though still evidently lingering near the spot, for she had seen her own daughter in the crowd, and she saw her still, in company with that good man, and they were evidently looking here and there for some one, but who it was she could not tell. She herself stood hid behind the buttress of a wall, until she saw them turn away, as if their search was in vain. She then ventured to follow, though at some distance, for she felt like one who treads with forbidden feet in the privileged steps of the happy and the pure.

And could it be true—all which that kind, that feeling man had told her—could there be hope even for her? Had he been a deceiver, he would not have entered with such faithfulness into all the details of her miserable experience. Had he been influenced by selfish or unworthy feelings, he would not have sought out for the objects of his pity, creatures so lost and fallen as herself.

Pondering these reflections in her mind, and still keeping the objects of her intense interest in view, the miserable woman beheld with surprise that they turned into the narrow street which led to her own dwelling. They approached the door, they actually entered; for in the distraction of her mind she had left it open. But how could she meet them? How could she look them in the face? unprepared as she still was, now and for ever, to renounce her besetting sin. She followed them, however, and with silent steps ascended the narrow stairs, concealing herself in a recess behind the door which opened into her own apartment. Here she could hear everything which transpired within; and great was the disappointment they expressed, on finding the occupant of that humble chamber still absent.

"It is me they are seeking, then," said she ; and she began to tremble as if about to be arraigned at the bar of judgment.

"I am confident," said Gilbert Gray, "that I saw her amongst the crowd ; I could not be mistaken in her features, though their expression was new to me ; I could not be mistaken in her tears, and never did I see such a look of humbled, heart-broken feeling, as that which her countenance wore."

"It is all in vain," said Maria with a deep sigh, "my hopes are again defeated."

"It is not—it cannot be in vain," said her companion, "while your mother is on this side the grave ; for is there not a power beyond and above us, directing all these things in wisdom, and in mercy ; softening the stubborn spirit, and guiding the perverse. Wait then, Maria, with patience ; but, while you wait, forget not to use the appointed means. Even now, there is something more to be done this night, before we sleep. I have spoken with such humble powers as I possess ; I have addressed them unsparingly ; and I came here prepared to meet your mother, as if she had been my mother too ; to appeal to her alone, to kneel at her feet, had it been necessary, to implore of her to put away this poison from her lips, this evil from her heart ; and now that she is not here, and cannot hear me, now that she has returned most probably to the haunts of vice, more hardened and more guilty, for the neglect of each repeated conviction—even now, I will not despair ; because I know that God has his own time for what his will designs. Even now I will not despair, so long as heaven is open to the voice of prayer."

The mother of Maria remained concealed until her two friends, the only friends she had in the whole world, had offered up a prayer on her behalf, in which she almost unconsciously had joined, in silence and in sorrow. She then watched them depart before entering her own chamber; and dreadful were the solitary hours of that long night, in which she could neither sleep nor rest, and often did her broken spirit quail under the horrors which a diseased imagination conjured up around her. All that human ingenuity can devise of torment and annoyance, was there; all that pride can endure of chagrin and mortification; all that remembrance can recall of bitterness and gall; all that anticipation can present of difficulty and dismay;—all these were there, with a thirst, an aching after something which a single act could, at any moment, supply—a single act, which the tempter within was ever-telling her would be seen and known by no one, would add nothing to her accumulated load of guilt, and would banish in an instant all the horrors which surrounded her.

And are such beings not to be pitied? not to be aided by every means which Christian benevolence can suggest? even if the price of our effort be to make some little sacrifice of our own social indulgence, our own accustomed stimulus, that we may say to them with unsullied lips, “I know it is possible to abstain, because I have made the trial.”

There is one consolation, however, to the victim of intemperance, who engages in this struggle, which ought never to be lost sight of. It is, that every day, every hour, which passes in a state of abstinence, is so much time gained upon the enemy; and the mother of Maria found this consolation in her lonely lot. The second

night was less wretched than the first ; and so on, until nearly a week had elapsed, when her daughter came to visit her, and learned the good tidings, and wept for very joy upon her mother's bosom. All was then peace between them. There was no suspicion, no reproach, no craving for the means of unlawful indulgence ; but a blessed hope, and a sweet calm, in which both partook, though, for the present, it was with fear and trembling.

With Isabel Ainsworth the case was widely different. She too had her seasons of better feeling, and of stronger hope ; but to peace she was yet a stranger ; simply, for this reason, that she had never made up her mind to renounce the evil wholly, and for ever. Thus, though her life was one of general abstinence, there were occasions when, without appearing culpable to others, all her sorrow, her shame, and her repentance, had to be renewed ; when the ground she had gained against her soul's enemy, was more than lost ; and when temptations to deception, to falsehood, and to many other kinds of evil, again beset her path.

It was while the purpose of her secret soul remained thus unsettled, that she was one day alarmed by a more than usually sudden and loud knock at the door ; and, starting from her seat to look out of the window, she saw a carriage drawn closely up to the steps, while her eye caught the figure of a physician with whom she was well acquainted, who appeared to be arranging with his servant, to convey some helpless burden into the house.

Never once did it strike Mrs. Ainsworth that anything could have happened to her husband ; he was so healthy, so vigorous, so unchanging in all his habits, so full of thoughts, and schemes, and calculations for this life only, that no one ever connected the idea of disease or

death with him. Yet, so it was ; paralysis had seized his active frame, and, while still retaining his mental faculties, he was borne to his chamber more helpless than a child, and scarcely wearing a resemblance to the eager money-making man who had that morning left his door.

To those who have loved the world for its wealth, its distinction, its pecuniary preeminence, how awful and appalling are the first sure symptoms of disease, when they know, and feel, that the very foundation of all they have ever coveted, or struggled for, is passing away from beneath them, as the shallow waves of the receding tide fall back from the vessel stranded on the shore.

Mr. Ainsworth was, of all men, in a situation to feel this. He had loved the world, not for its rational enjoyments, but for the many victories it had afforded him the means of obtaining in the great conflict, where money is the prize, where gain is the crown of glory, and loss the badge of disgrace. In the same proportion, he had resisted the encroachments of old age, purely because he knew, that as he lost ground, others would steal past him, and make sure of the advantages, which his experience, added to his natural capacity, enabled him to grasp. What then were his reflections, while his mind retained the power of thought, clogged by a body now deprived of muscular power, distorted, speechless, and inert ?

Had the fearful stroke, under whose powerful mastery he now lay, extended its influence to other members of Mr. Ainsworth's family, they could scarcely have been more helpless, than when this critical emergency demanded the full exercise of all their faculties of thought and action. Their experience had hitherto been filled up with the minute affairs of human life, upon which, however, they had expended so much contrivance and

activity, that they had nothing left for great occasions ; while the habit of doing everything with reference to economy, as the one paramount principle of human conduct, left them altogether adrift upon a sea of uncertainty, when circumstances rendered it necessary for any higher principle to be recognized.

Of all the household, Isabel alone was able to see and understand the exact measure of importance proper to be attached, not only to every symptom of her husband's malady, but to every measure it became necessary to adopt in the present critical state of their affairs. She knew better than any of the rest what illness was, what were its requirements, and what it was possible for kindness and solicitude to effect. She knew too, for she had lately learned this hard lesson, what it was to be slighted, to be left alone in sorrow and suffering ; and, instead of revenging upon others the ill-advised severity they had inflicted upon her, she nobly determined, that no one, possessing natural or lawful claims to her consideration, should be able to accuse her of having neglected the duties of a wife or a mother.

There might be a mixture of pride in this resolution, a taint of evil in this seeming good ; but the effort had its reward, and Isabel Ainsworth soon found herself the most important person in her husband's family, the counsellor to whom all appealed, the moving spring of every exertion. What a situation for one who had been so lately despised and neglected ! The very novelty and strangeness of it startled her into a new, and hitherto unknown existence ; energies of which she had been unconscious, awoke from their long sleep ; and her whole being, renovated by this wonder-working change, became instinct with faculties, and vital with feelings, to

which she had been a total stranger through the long winter of her previous life. Where all had been cold and desolate around her, the first dawn of real affection began now to appear. In the days of her childhood, she had been loved as a pet and a plaything. That love, as it naturally does, had died away, and long and dreary had been the interval between those days and the present ; but she was now loved for the real value of her services and her character ; and, from this foundation in the esteem of those around her, there was no danger of her being removed—no danger, so long as her habits were controlled by better principles—no danger, so long as her besetting sin was wholly laid aside.

So long as this sin had been occasionally indulged, there had been a proportionate languor, fretfulness, and despondency, which rendered the performance of every duty doubly hard ; but now, what a noble privilege it was, for the once despised and neglected mother, to be able to look her children in the face, and to feel that, in this respect at least, she was not unworthy of their affection and esteem ! In this respect, her conscience was now unsullied. The evil was removed, wholly, and for ever ; and therefore it was, that temptation lessened every day ; therefore it was, that domestic love again drew its silken cords around her heart ; that cheerfulness again smiled around her ; that hope beckoned onward, and that peace, to which she had too long been a stranger, again smoothed her pillow, and softened all the asperities of her earthly lot.

And how should it have been otherwise ? for now the sick and solitary child, to whom her kindness and judicious care had opened the treasures of a new world, would often hang around her neck with tears of gratitude and

joy, recounting, with simple but impressive earnestness, each separate instance of consideration by which her sufferings had been ameliorated, or her enjoyments increased; while the other sisters, whose judgments rather than whose hearts had been in fault, would now expatiate upon the satisfaction of saving money, not for its possession, but for its benevolent and proper use.

Nor was the change less evident in the sentiments of Mr. Ainsworth towards the wife who now so carefully and dutifully ministered to the comforts of his feeble frame. His powers of utterance were partially restored, but his strength remained as that of a child; and Isabel, who, for so many years of her life, had studied the comfort of no one but herself, might often be seen pacing to and fro, in the sunshine, along the narrow gravel walk of her town-garden, with her helpless husband leaning on her arm, still occasionally murmuring at her reckless expenditure of his wealth; yet so occupied with his bodily affliction, as to leave the management of these things more and more in her hands.

It was after one of these sunny walks, that Isabel, having assisted her husband to his couch, retired to her own room, where she was soon interrupted by the entrance of Maria, who, with more than her accustomed diffidence and hesitation, laid before the attention of her mistress a subject which had long occupied her own.

"Then, you mean," said Mrs. Ainsworth, after the conversation had been continued for some time, without taking any definite turn, "you mean, by changing your way of life, that you are about to marry; do you, Maria?"

"That is my intention, if you please, ma'am," said Maria, glad to be relieved from the difficulty of explaining herself.







J. M. W. Turner, R.S.A.

Autumn

“Take care, Maria,” said Mrs. Ainsworth, rather hastily, “take care that your motives are right, that you are not marrying for a home, or for the sake of having some one to protect you. These things are all well in their way ; but bitter is the lot of the woman who marries for these alone.”

“I beg your pardon,” said Maria, “you do not know the excellent gentleman—the person I am going to marry. We have long been acquainted. He is in a more respectable station in life than myself, and, therefore, so long as my mother kept to her old habits, I was determined not to bring disgrace into his family ; but now, he has taken my poor mother to be his housekeeper. Like a son, he watches over, and cares for her body and soul ; and so entire is his confidence in her reformation, that everything he has in his house is committed to her trust. Even his servant looks up to her ; and, oh ! ma’am, it would do your heart good, to see her now, in her old age, seated in her arm-chair by his fireside, and receiving from him all the kind attentions of a son.”

It was even so, as Maria had said ; and the same zealous and indefatigable friend of the unfortunate, who had sought the abodes of the destitute and depraved, for the purpose of rescuing from irremediable ruin, the wretched outcasts from society, whom few of their fellow-creatures passed even in the common walks of life, without loathing and abhorrence, the same man who had spoken home to that distracted woman, on the very evening when she had contemplated her own destruction, had taken her within the shelter of his own roof, and now beheld her every day “clothed and in her right mind,” a miracle of mercy, a mystery to herself, and a wonder to the few who were acquainted with her former life.

It was even so, as Maria had said ; and on the morning of her marriage-day, she came, already dressed in bridal white, and, kneeling at her mother's feet, as she sat in her accustomed chair, besought her blessing on the solemn and important step she was about to take.

The mother looked earnestly at her child, for she knew it was her wedding-morn, but she had not expected this ; and, in that long, long gaze of maternal affection, what thoughts flowed in upon her soul ! Where had she gone ? Back in imagination to the day of her own marriage—back to the season of youth, when her bosom was unstained with guilt—back to her father's cottage, and the blessing of the old man on her first-born babe. The dark thoughts which succeeded to these, may be better understood than described, as heavy tears began to roll down her cheeks, while, with both hands, she hid her face, and wept like a child.

“ Your blessing, mother,” said he who had been to her as a son, “ your blessing is all we ask.”

“ My blessing !” said the mother, raising her tearful eyes, while she held her clasped hands above the head of her kneeling child—“ who bends so low as to ask a blessing of *me* ? Yet, since it must be so, take thou, my child, the blessing of a mother's heart ; and, as I have failed to teach thee what to aim at, let my sad example teach thee what to shun.”

END OF VOL. I.







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